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## **EDITORIAL**

**Ruth Wallace**

**Charles Darwin University**

The lifelong learning agenda has focused the attention of educational policy, research and practice to the formal and informal learning contexts across the life span. Some of the key issues developing in this arena are language, place and identity. Field (2005) has confirmed the value of social capital theory in analysing the relationships and networks that operate throughout all aspects of lifelong learning. By better understanding the relationships that underpin learning and learning communities, the connection to a range of educational spheres can be identified; these include the school, community and professional networks. These communities of practice are informed by the contexts in which they function and their diverse knowledge systems.

The knowledge, place and learning specific contexts discussed within these papers include

- Indigenous digital environments that operate in regional, remote and urban contexts.
- workplace organisation learning events
- Northern Territory, Australia school teachers involved in professional development
- graduates of the Bachelor of Community Learning and Development working in a range of communities
- South Australian high school teachers responding to the implications of the professional development policy

The authors' discussion demonstrate the importance of developing our understanding of the role of identity, place, culture and our notions of node ownership , generation and management in considering lifelong learning. The bonding, bridging and linking relationships described are key in the social and professional changes that are part of engagement in learning communities and events whether at a local, community, generational or professional basis. The connection to the development of educational policy, institutions and processes are then essential in extending the ways we recognise and work across these diverse knowledge contexts and learning interactions. These papers offer insights to develop and deepen our discussion of a shared and lifelong event

# ESSENCE OF LEARNING: SOCIAL CAPITAL IN WORKPLACE LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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## Introduction

Toni is a highly successful small rural enterprise operator in her mid-thirties. She is well-regarded by industry groups and governments for her 'common sense', youthful entrepreneurialism and as someone who embodies the benefits of active and engaged learning through life. Let me begin this paper by posing Toni's seemingly simple question:

For so many people, they do their formal training when they are young and then their ongoing learning is simply what they learn on the job. People tend to think of their skills as the original piece of paper that they got, not this immense wealth of information that they've picked up along the way. People are often astounded when I say I don't actually have a tertiary qualification, but I've learnt an enormous amount as I've gone on. People have to *learn how to value that* and *how to make that happen*. If you want to move from job to job, *how do you transform the skills* that you've picked up on the job into something tangible that a new employer can recognise? [*italics added*]

Learning how to value ones skills and knowledge, and transforming these into new behaviours, lies at the core of effective workplace learning. But the point Toni makes illustrates the core challenge

of learning in workplaces everywhere: How do we choose which of our array of existing learnings to “transform” into productive future actions? How do we “make that happen”? This paper illustrates these *how* dimensions by explaining the role of a long-missing essence that facilitates this change – identity.

Learning occurs when interaction occurs. Interaction occurs when people engage each other, and engagement can occur in many ways. Learning from engagement can take place face-to-face. Engagement on telephones and emails is also a site for learning. Learning occurs in the engagement between a person and various kinds of texts, and when a person engages with the texts of their thoughts. In all these interactions, it is the engagement that brings to the fore the past experiences (skills and knowledge) of the interactants. Simultaneously, these often unconscious choices from past experiences are guided by two factors: (a) facets of the interactants’ identities, and (b) expectations of future scenarios that mix with identity resources to define the experiences selected. That is, the identity-shaped selection of experiences forms the essence of learning that occurs in these engagements.

Put another way, the outputs (benefits, impacts) of ‘the essence of learning’ are situationally formed and determined. Formal qualifications provide a warrant to act in some cases, while personal skills and knowledge brought together by (and embedded in) appropriate identity resources provide the motivation for action.

Since, as I discuss in this paper, the essence of learning occurs in engagements, it is in the interests of all those involved in workplace learning to understand as much about this ‘essence’ as possible.

What actually goes on when human beings muster relevant pools of their past and existing resources in engagements so as to pursue a future specific purpose? The resources to engagement, I argue here, are only partly formed from the skills and knowledge we have come to refer to as human capital. The essential resource component is, in fact, aspects of the human participants' identities. When the knowledge and skills of human resources blend at the point of engagement with the relevant components of identity resources, social capital is at once produced and built. Learning is, in these moments of engagement, the simultaneous using and building of the knowledge and identity resources from which social capital is formed.

The paper has these aims. First, I want to tease out some of the main terms used, such as learning, engagement and social capital. Second, I will illustrate the points made through reference to a workplace organisational learning event. Finally, I will bring these strands together in a discussion about the essence of learning engagement, namely the blending of physical, human and social capital in integrated human learning.

Let me now unpack these ideas.

### **Learning, engagement and social capital**

I accept for the moment a broad notion of learning as a process of managing and producing change in individuals and their environments. These changes are articulated in the learning literature under different strands of research, only a few of which are mentioned here. They may be emphasised differently, for example, as knowledge or skills acquisition (e.g., Bloom, 1956) cognition (e.g., Bransford, 1970; Gagné, 1985), adult learning (e.g., Brookfield, 1986; Candy, 1991; Merriam,

2001; Mezirow, 1994), learning for its own inherent worth (e.g., Fauré; 1972), learning as being a member of a community of practice (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) or learning as a re-configuration of existing aspects of personal identity, knowledge and skills (e.g., Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Falk, 2001). In each of these emphases, learning is conceived of, and researched, differently. However, in this paper, I hone in on the latter, functional meaning for learning which, I believe, incorporates and articulates the others: that is, learning is the process of acquisition or reconfiguration of skills, knowledge and identity, which in turn assists the adoption of different roles or identities, resulting in a change in behaviour and/or a capacity to function using new knowledge, skills, values and attitudes within communities of practice.

Communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) are more than just groups of individuals learning *from* and *with* each other. They are groups of individuals where learning occurs *between* the group members. In workplaces everywhere, people interact and engage with each other and the texts and technologies of their work. Boden (1994) makes the point that the problem of recent social science has been “to treat abstract patterns of social relations as structure and everyday processes as *something else*” (p. 204, original italics). Here, read ‘communities of practice’ as ‘structure’, and ‘everyday processes’ as ‘learning engagements’. “Instead”, Boden continues, “they are one” (p. 204). That is, a community of practice and the learnings that occur within it are, in fact, mutually constituting, where “the single web of reality is woven, moment by moment, out of the practical structures of everyday life” (Boden, 1994, p. 204). That is, the views of learning in this paper are complementary to those of communities of practice, each showing a different aspect of a holistic learning environment.

The significance of the learning theory surrounding communities of practice lies as much in its implications for practice as for its abstracted account of social learning as commitment to group values and associated practices. However, the researcher's gaze has remained mainly on individuals rather than embracing the fullness of implications of learning in communities of common interest. Even when we discuss communities of practice, for example, our focus is usually still on the role of individuals within that wider group. The problem is that we understand, and rightly I believe, that the *repository* of learning outcomes lies 'in' individuals, while the *act of learning* is one of interaction – of engagement between partners in the learning act. In this paper, I ask the reader to share what it means to re-focus our gaze on the *act of learning engagement* itself rather than on the individuals who are engaging with each other.

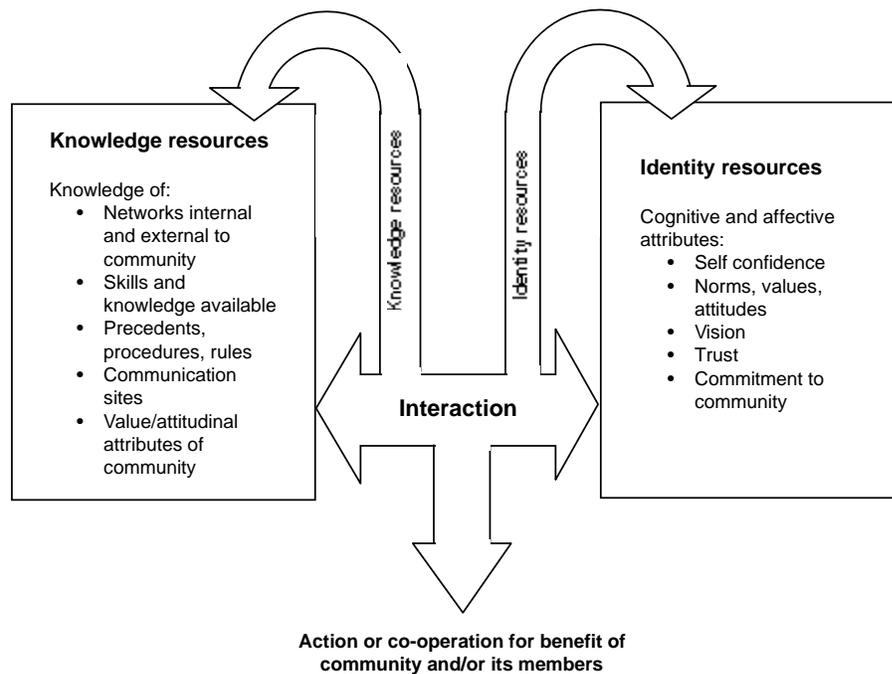
Aspects of the learning theory outlined in this paper also resonate with Pillay's (forthcoming, 2005) discussion on distributed learning. The truth of this distribution, however, lies in *how* these distributed resources are utilised, *at what point* the resources are deployed, and *which of a larger pool of resources* are drawn on for which engagements. Learning only occurs in the act of engagement with individuals and each other, as well as the tangible, physical and inanimate objects that are implicated in the engagement, such as tables and chairs, computers and books. We all have to sit, lie, stand, walk and think somewhere, on something, in somewhere. In all these locations and social situations, we are, all the time, 'being' someone – playing a role, being a boss, being a clerk, being a female or a male, being a team player, being an engineer, displaying a particular ethnicity, doing a good job, playing the fool, displaying our identities, skills and knowledge as we do so. Engagement is the engine room of learning, and it is the place where we become someone different in subtle and not-so-subtle ways through that learning. These identity resources that emerge during

the change processes we refer to as 'learning'; in addition, the notion of identity resources provides the explanatory underpinning to 'transformational learning' (e.g., Mezirow, 1994) – when skills, knowledge and the capacity to see oneself as being and doing something differently come together and influence action.

In summary of this point, the process of engagement, I argue, is when learning occurs. Knowledge, skills and identity resources available for the learning are identified in the following paragraphs to be 'social capital'. 'Engagement' is a term I use for those meaningful interactions, also clarified in the following paragraphs, between people and organisations when learning occurs. These interactions both building and use the networks, common values and trust commonly included in the term 'social capital'.

There is some agreement in the literature as to a definition of social capital. In general terms it is agreed to refer to the social values (norms), networks and trust (Putnam, 1993) that resource a group's purposeful action. Woolcock (1998, p. 155) describes social capital as "encompassing the norms and networks facilitating collective action for mutual benefit". Portes (1998, p. 7) observes that, "whereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships". Others emphasise one aspect over another, for example Fukuyama (1995) focuses on trust. Beyond these broadly-based definitions, however, there are different ways in which the idea of social capital is mobilised, and I will deal with one of these that underpins the important assumption that, if social capital exists, then it must have been built. Where? How? By whom? When? Why?

These questions are addressed in research into the production and use of social capital and its relationship to learning (e.g., Balatti & Falk, 2002; Brown & Lauder, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Falk, 1997a; Falk, 1997b; Falk & Harrison, 1998; Falk & Kilpatrick, 1999; Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; OECD, 2001a). In a real sense, this research picks up on the Portes formulation (see previous paragraphs) of social capital by finding how to get the human capital ‘out of peoples’ heads’ through social capital as resources for engagement. The research has developed a theoretical model (see Figure 1) showing how people are engaged in learning as they solved problems across differing socio-cultural situations in their everyday lives.



*Figure 1: Building and using social capital, Falk & Kilpatrick 2000.*

The learning here depends on the quality of the resources available for these people to draw on in their differing network interactions, and the resources fall into two categories: ‘knowledge’ and ‘identity’ resources. Knowledge resources include knowledge of who, when and where to go for

advice or resources and knowledge of how to get things done. Identity resources concern being able and willing to commit to purposeful action for the benefit of the community and its members, and more will be said about identity resources below.

Learning takes place while social capital is built. That is, learning occurs when the set of interactions utilizes existing knowledge and identity resources and simultaneously adds to them. 'Learning' occurs *in* the interaction/s. The three components of the model are (a) the interaction between participants, (b) the resources (social capital) potentially available to that interaction, and (c) the desired outcome of the interaction. As Balatti and Falk (2002) describe it, the

...desired outcome is the common purpose that unites and motivates the network or group (as small as two) to interact, and it is the purpose-in-hand that in fact defines the qualities of the social capital (knowledge and identity resources) drawn on in the interaction. That is, until the purpose is known and communally identified, then the constitution of the contribution of the individuals' knowledge and identity resources remains amorphous. (p. 287)

The common purpose can be under continuous negotiation, a characteristic Wenger (1998) identifies in communities of practice. The interaction can, but need not be, face-to-face (it can be a phone interaction or by electronic mail) and it can be formal (e.g., a meeting) or informal (e.g., a chance meeting over the office photocopier).

In this view of learning, identity resources are described by Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) as the "common understandings related to personal, individual and collective identities" (p. 100). Lesser

and Storck (2001) confirm the importance of the role of identity as an aspect of social capital development in workplace learning communities of practice:

...a sense of identity is important because it determines how an individual directs his or her attention. What one pays attention to is, in turn, a primary factor in learning. Therefore identity shapes the learning process. (p. 832)

The explanatory power of the Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) view of learning is, however, that it not only demonstrates that identity *is* a primary factor, but in fact shows *how* this is the case, and further, locates the *source* of its primary importance as resources-to-learning that have the capacity to be shaped so as to influence learning's impacts and benefits.

An additional benefit of the model lies in the way the common purpose for learning can be seen to influence the precise nature of the required learning resources. Balatti and Falk (2002) describe how the social capital available to the participants lies within the knowledge resources and the identity resources brought to the interaction by the participants. The specific subset of these resources used to achieve the desired outcome of any interaction that contributes to the common purpose constitutes the social capital *on and for that occasion*. That is, the social capital required for engaged learning is also situationally determined. It is likely that a different set of interactions, for a different common purpose, will draw on a different subset and configuration of available knowledge and identity resources. Therefore, Balatti and Falk (2002) find, "...mapping or measuring individual knowledge or identity attributes is of limited use without knowledge of the purpose towards which the resources are aimed" (p. 833).

So far, we have seen that the value of the social capital available to the participants in an interaction is determined by two factors: first, the match between the desired outcome and the collective knowledge and identity resources available to the interaction, and second, the nature of the interaction itself. The effectiveness of the learning interaction is determined by the situated processes that occur within the interaction and the conditions under which the interaction takes place.

As an example of how social capital is mobilised through learning, think of an instance of interaction between two people in a workplace – say a chance meeting over how to fix a jam in the new photocopier. If the ‘interaction’ shown in the horizontal bar in Figure 1 is pictured as the learning engagement for this purpose in this workplace community of practice, then it can be pictured how its outcomes (‘Action or cooperation for benefit of community and/or its members’ – the people get the jam fixed) are entirely dependent on the inputs: the quality and quantity of the resources for the action: the ‘knowledge resources’ (knowing how other copiers work, knowing how to find the directions, skill in performing similar tasks) and the ‘identity resources’ (willingness to ‘have a go’ at fixing it, self-perception as having the confidence, risk-taking, or an identity as ‘not being mechanical’) that are drawn on in those engagements.

Through the construction and reconstruction of knowledge and identity resources according to the requirements of the *collective but specific purpose* in hand (fixing the paper jam), learning has the capacity to produce wider benefits. These benefits can be for individuals (the two people get their copying done and learn to work together in the future), the workplace as a whole (the copier works

for those who follow), and for the broader socio-economy (costs involved in repairs are avoided, goodwill built in workplace horizontally and vertically). However, it is equally easy to see in this example how the wrong kinds of knowledge and identity resources being drawn on in the workplace engagement over the photocopier can produce negative outcomes for the individuals and the workplace.

The sorts of goodwill (referred to above) that appropriately resourced engagements can induce might also have spin-off benefits with social and economic impacts through what the social capital literature refers to as ‘reciprocity’. Reciprocity can, in its many forms, produce positive and sustainable outcomes, as the sense of obligation to each other gained during interactions produces direct and beneficial knowledge and identity resources for future activities. People are more likely to assist each other once interactions have provided the basis for establishing common values (norms) to which a widening group of people feel able to subscribe. One such study (Ingram & Roberts, 2000) demonstrates how cooperation between rival hotel managers results in dramatic increases to profitability. In another study, Lesser and Storck (2001) find that there are four benefits in social capital building through communities of practice: there is a decrease in the learning curve, increase in customer responsiveness, reduction in rework and preventing of reinvention, and an increase in innovation (p. 839).

However, as also suggested above, the benefits of effective learning via building social capital impact more widely than within the immediate learning community alone. In fact, the OECD (2001b) reports on an empirical analysis of “the relationships between learning (in its various forms) and economic performance at the regional level” (p. 31). One question in the OECD study

asks, “What is the importance of social capital in determining the processes of learning?” The answer to this question, in general terms, is that “[A] lack of social capital impedes learning and economic success” (p. 100). Balatti and Falk (2002) describe a study in which the impacts of learning were documented against the OECD (1982) eight indicator areas of socio-economic well-being, a framework taken up by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001). The eight areas are Health; Education and learning; Employment and the quality of working life; Time and leisure; Command over goods and services; Physical environment; Social environment and Personal safety. Impacts of learning were documented in all eight areas.

It is important to stress that the identity and knowledge resources drawn on and contributed in the interactions varies, depending on the purpose for the interactions being observed. The significance of this point for the planning of *appropriate* resources for each workplace contextualised task, each of which has a different purpose, cannot be underestimated.

### **The interaction of learning and context**

The qualities of the knowledge and identity resources are entirely situated, in that they are shown to depend on specific socio-cultural contextual elements, shaped by what the participants in the learning interaction bring to the learning interaction in the way of knowledge and identity resources. This in turn depends on the context of their lives, including their networks, history, the communities they belong to, their values, self-esteem and the values and norms of the wider society. Learning occurs in, and is given meaning by, its particular socio-cultural context. At the same time, aspects of the context (including the purpose for the interaction) act in a reciprocal relationship with knowledge and identity resources drawn on in each and every learning occasion.

The learning that takes place in interactions depends on context, but it also impacts on context. Micro interactions have the capacity, through learning, to change the knowledge and identity resources of the individual participants. Through their networks and interactions with others, there is the potential for a 'ripple' effect from one learning interaction to impact on subsequent learning interactions involving other individuals. These other individuals may belong to other communities in the wider society, providing a channel for micro level learning interactions to impact at the level of macro social capital.

### **Engaging physical, human and social capital: the case of the plumber's apprentice**

In order to illustrate the point of the paper, that the integration of social capital and learning theory described in the previous section provides a much-needed link between the simple existence of skills and knowledge and the availability of these attributes for the collective well-being of the workplace and the wider community, I will use the case of the plumber's apprentice (Falk, 1995). The discussion will consist of a short transcript of a learning event along with a commentary. The commentary shows how the physical, human and social capital is woven into the fabric of the interactions. It also shows how, without the social capital, the knowledge and skills are not available for wider use.

The learning event takes place between a plumber (P), a city plumbing inspector (I), and a plumber's apprentice (A). The interactions portrayed are not only between people, but also between these people and their physical contextual artifacts such as text books, gazettes and pipes. The learning is seen to draw on two sets of resources, which were described in the previous section on social capital. First, there are the skills and knowledge resources sometimes referred to as

human capital. These resources include the participants' knowledge (to a greater or lesser degree) of precedents, relevant physical objects, procedures and rules, together with some skills associated with manipulating the physical objects of 'plumbing'. However, these skills and knowledge do *not alone* constitute 'learning to be a plumber'. The second group of resources drawn on are the identity resources that the participants bring to bear in the course of the social interactions. It is these identity resources that form the vital 'missing' jigsaw pieces of learning to be a plumber.

The plumber is on a building site, and has his apprentice plumber with him. The passage opens with the plumber and his apprentice. The plumber is checking whether the apprentice has learned some material relating to drains. The Plumbing Inspector then joins them. His task is to inspect the work in progress, although he sees himself as being of some assistance to the apprentice in learning the ropes.

The by-law referred to in the transcript is in the Sewerage and Water Supply Act. Also referred to is the Australian Quality Standard A.S. 3500.2 – 1990. The Glossary of Terms is a glossary in the gazette of plumbing by-laws.

1. P Reading By-law 105, can you combine fixtures into a single discharge pipe and connect it to a DT?
2. A Not really. There is no real set out that says that it can be done. Not unless it's in By-law 82. There is no rule, no real direction at all ... is there?

3. P OK. I'd like you to read the [National] Standard 3.11, "Unvented Branch Drains".  
What is the minimum size unvented branch drain you can use? You might have to use Table 6.1 to answer that.
- [The apprentice reads the Standard]
4. A We haven't got to these Standards yet. [in the technical college course]
5. P That's OK, it doesn't matter if you're right or wrong.
6. A I didn't finish reading it, so I better keep going... 8.5 metres?
7. P The length is right - 8.5 metres, but what is the minimum diameter?
8. I [Plumbing Inspector joins group] Do you want me to go away? Am I making you nervous?
9. A 40 mils, I think.
10. A [To the Inspector...] What do you reckon?
11. I Where does it say 40?
12. A I can't see 40 at all, I'm just taking a punt... Minimum size 65 mils, I'm sorry - I didn't look at the table.
13. I I can give you an interpretation of 50 mils from a fixture drain. Now I want you to look at something. The answer is 65 under the existing By-laws Unvented, connected to a vented house drain. That's the difference.
14. P [To apprentice] Were you aware of that?
15. A Yeah.
16. I Oh bullshit
17. A I'll admit; I don't even know half or a third of the By-laws.

18. I I'll give you a tip. First thing when looking for anything, look up the Glossary of Terms, and see what you're talking about, and read that. Then look for minimum sizes, "sizing", and all it says there is ... it doesn't actually give a minimum size, but it says "size of pipe", so then you say, OK, what's the minimum size of drains. That does say 65, but then to cover your tracks you have to go back and see what is your minimum size of drain, and you have to go to that section in the book [Glossary].

**Discussion: Essence of engaged workplace learning: Social capital as knowledge and identity resources**

Learning to be a 'plumber', in this extract, is seen as drawing on social capital resources particular to and defined by the socio-cultural context and purpose so that the process constitutes 'learning' – in this case, learning about the knowledge and identity resources of the plumbing vocation. There is the knowledge of who is important, their roles and when to take notice of them. There is knowledge of the precedents, procedures, rules and communication sites that are used for the purpose in hand. Knowledge of where to look, in what books, and the technical skills associated with extracting meaning from spoken and written texts. The transcript is clearly related to learning the knowledge and identity resources associated with 'being a plumber' and the way the knowledge and identity resources are brought to bear can be traced and documented as 'learning' in this learning event.

The learning interactions in the transcript that draw on social capital resources bring into the social sphere reference to various mediating artifacts, as Engeström (1999a, b & c) calls them. For example, turns 1, 3, 6, 12, 13 and 18 refer to the text of the By-laws and the Standards publication.

The apprentice responds to the instructions of his workmates, related to the task under discussion, both of the plumber and the inspector, especially in turns 2, 6, 12 and 17. The interspersed nature of the information gathering relevant to the purpose in hand, and its immediate application to the furtherance of answering the question posed in turn 1, punctuate the jointly constructed nature of knowledge and identity in this learning event. The construction of the meaning via the interactions is the vehicle that brings the knowledge and skills into play so that the re-formation of those attributes can be achieved as 'learning'.

Knowledge of, as well as 'learning to be', or 'being able to act out' (identity) the precedents, procedures, roles (interactional infrastructure) and social relations of 'plumbing' (values infrastructure) are equally important resources for learning in this case. The impact on the learning event when the plumbing inspector arrives is evident in, for example, turns 8 to 16. The impact on the apprentice is evident in turn 12 through the uncertainty of the response. Until turn 8, the plumber and apprentice have been answering the question posed in turn 1. From turn 11, the conversation is directed towards pipe diameters and how to find them.

One result of the analysis of the passage above is to show how, for this learning event, there is no one correct answer that can be gained from a single source. The 'right' answer is one which is socially constructed and progressively negotiated by the participants. The sense they end up sharing in common is jointly constructed by them through the conversational turns in the sequence. The outcome of this learning is finally jointly accepted by the participants as the 'right' answer. As seen in the analysis, it is through the apprentice's micro level learning interactions that his developing knowledge works in with the identity formation as 'plumber'. The 'plumber' identity is

one that the plumber himself and the plumbing inspector bring to the micro interactions from the meso and macro socio-cultural constructions of the 'plumber' identity and incumbent attributes associated with the category of a 'plumber' as enacted in this event, such as the plumbing inspector's 'tip' in turn 18. Moreover, the apprentice carries meso level identity from his technical education course context, as evidenced in turn 4 through the pronoun 'we', which indexes the coursework associated with 'being a plumber' in the macro level national plumbing Standards, made explicit in turn 3.

It is argued, therefore, that an individual's 'identity', or subjectivity, is created and recreated in the course of these everyday interactive conversations, and is created and re-created intersubjectively as the members draw upon categories of jointly understood meaning – social capital's knowledge and identity resources – as they collectively and progressively accept, create, re-accept and re-create their sense-in-common. The identity resources drawn on in the interactions are, therefore, as central to the learning processes as the knowledge and skills. Neither is it the quantity of resources alone that matters, since the above analysis shows how the *particular*, embedded and contextualised identity resources are equally responsible for what counts as workplace learning.

### **What does this mean for the practice of workplace learning?**

I have argued that the essence of learning engagement requires the blending of physical, human and social capital in integrated human learning events. More than this, however, is the fact that the events themselves are the only opportunities for skills and knowledge to be brought into play. It is only in these opportunities for social capital to be used and built that learning occurs, because these are the times when skills and knowledge are brought out into the public arena. How many times do

you recall comments such as “I didn’t know you could do that!” – the implication being that the person’s skills and/or knowledge, as Portes (1998, p. 7) reminds us, are locked “inside their heads”. Only when the opportunities for interaction occur is it possible for the skills and knowledge to become known, and available for useful purposes.

If we are to take seriously the notion of re-focusing our gaze on the resources for engagement rather than on the individuals who are participants in the interaction, we could see value in designing learning engagements instead of, as is the case of the plumber’s apprentice, just letting them happen. From the first words of turn 18 where the Inspector says “I’ll give you a tip” we are alerted to the discrepancy between the resources needed for successful learning engagements and their actual availability for learning engagements. ‘Learning’ is often seen as a commodity that lies dormant in a single authority of some kind (a glossary, text book, computer or person) awaiting us to dig it out – or have another (teacher, trainer, facilitator) assist us in this process. The assumption here is that this knowledge is ‘true’, unitary, objective, and simply needs unlocking from its repositories. The lesson from the case of the plumber’s apprentice is that the resources for knowledge building through engagement have not been explicitly recognised or planned for. The Inspector’s “tip” points us towards the combined missing complex of resources that, in fact, no single authority holds.

There will always be a crucial role for learning of the kind found in the case of the plumber’s apprentice, but think for a moment of the pattern of such a learning event if it were to be rather more designed than serendipitous. First, defining and seeking collective commitment (via needs identification) to the specific purpose for the learning engagement would be the initial subject of

the engagement. Second, the need and purpose would then establish the required resources, including explicit identification of the skills and knowledge resources, but as well the components of identity resources and their repositories – the plumber, the Inspector, the rules and glossaries included. Third, the designed engagement would reinforce the commitment to the specific purpose-through-engagement with the defined knowledge and identity resources. Fourth, designed learning engagements would need to be monitored for their uptake of resources-for-purpose in the engagements. Slippage is likely in monitoring where more traditional repositories of ‘knowledge’ are mistakenly judged as having sole appropriateness. Rather, monitoring needs to ensure that the engagement of knowledge and identity resources combines as knowledge production in ongoing sequences of learning engagements that build to learning events.

The case of the plumber’s apprentice is one where the interactions are face-to-face, but as noted in the first part of this paper, interactions can be between all manner of other entities, such as a person interacting with people via emails, with their computer software, a book or a piece of paper. The important and central notion here is that it is the interaction that releases the so-called human capital into the public sphere where it can be put to use. Clearly, however, the qualities of those interactions, and the purposes to which they are directed, will determine the strategic component of learning for a particular workplace.

I now return to the question posed by Toni in the opening of this paper. Essentially, her question is: How do you re-value and transform existing learnings into something tangible and relevant in a different context?

When a person changes tasks within or between workplaces, they bring with them their so-called human capital skills which are locked “inside their heads”. To get it out of their heads requires interactions of some kind. The significance of this point for the planning of appropriate resources for each workplace contextualised task, where each one has a different purpose, cannot be underestimated. The issue is not one only one of providing the affordances (e.g., Billett, 2002) and hoping that engagement will follow: what precisely would be the take-home message the plumber’s apprentice received about ‘being a plumber’ from the scenario above? The issue is to design engagement opportunities so as to better facilitate the inclusion of appropriate aspects of the affordances in each purposeful engagement. This suggests the need to focus not only on the affordances, or characteristics of the individual learners (such as their knowledge or skills), but on the learning engagement as well.

The work described in this paper makes clear that each and every learning engagement will draw on more or less different sets of knowledge and identity resources as relevant to the purpose of the learning engagement of the moment. These resources will be available to a greater or lesser extent in the available affordances. By designing learning opportunities that have been analysed so as to establish the chief aspects of the knowledge and identity resources required for those purposeful learning engagements, the issue of willingness to engage, and “what one pays attention to” (Lesser & Storck, 2001, p. 832), is promoted through the mechanism of applied identity resources.

## **Conclusions**

The essence of engagement lies in the simultaneous availability of the ‘right’ resources for the ‘right’ purpose and the ‘right’ time. In teasing out what these ‘right’ resources are, this paper has

identified the vital and often ignored group of social capital resources called here ‘identity resources’. It is only via the availability of the ‘right’ – fit-for-purpose – identity resources that learning in workplaces can be affected and effective. Yes, it is important for workers to possess the ‘right’ knowledge and skills, but, as we have seen, these can easily lie dormant, and locked up in individuals or indeed expressed through engagement in places and ways that do not benefit the organization. When the organizational capacity is taken to explicitly include the building of appropriate identity resources for the organizational purposes relevant at that time, then operationalising organisational agility becomes strategically possible.

This paper has mainly focused on the significance of learning engagements for workplaces. However, effective workplace learning engagements string together to build into learning events. Learning events can have reciprocal benefits for the workplace and their connected communities, as shown in the OECD and other literature discussed early in the paper. Additional lessons from the social capital literature lie in the benefits to be gained for enterprises by facilitating a blend of networking, values-development and trust between workplaces and outside communities, as well as within them, with all the cautions about balance and critique that the term ‘real learning’ involves.

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# **FRACTURING THE SKELETON OF PRINCIPLE: AUSTRALIAN LAW, ABORIGINAL LAW, AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY**

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## **Introduction**

Aboriginal people in Australia today are constructing extremely diverse cultures. Increasingly, these cultures involve some aspect of digital technologies - videos, DVDs, CDs, digital photos, audiofiles etc. Emerging Aboriginal digital environments are affecting the intergenerational transmission of traditional culture wherever Aboriginal people are using digital technologies in their work of (re)producing culture in cities, towns and very remote locations. The work which is being done in some of these contexts is discussed in other papers (Christie, 2001, 2004, 2005) and on a project website ([www.cdu.edu.au/ik](http://www.cdu.edu.au/ik)).<sup>1</sup>

This paper is about how the resources Aboriginal people produce in their own digital environments can be viewed by Australian law. My title is taken from Justice Brennan, writing in reference to the Mabo case: a willingness to engage flexible interpretations of legal doctrine to reflect Aboriginal

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<sup>1</sup> We should remember that Aboriginal adolescents are as fully engaged in the processes of cultural construction as their older relatives even if the digital resources in their hands (gameboys, hiphop CDs, ghetto blasters) apparently have little to do with traditional culture. {Groome, 1995}.

interests should be welcomed, he wrote, provided this does not ‘fracture the skeleton of principle’ of Australian law.

This is not the legal story of the intellectual property (IP) which is growing alongside the sudden flowering of “databases of indigenous knowledge”. Such databases until now have mostly involved a collaboration between Aboriginal and nonAboriginal developers, when much of the technical work is inevitably under nonIndigenous control.<sup>2</sup> The Intellectual Property around all this is complicated. This will be the case for a long time, not because databases are highly technical objects to operate, but because the way they do things with knowledge, the ways they ‘intellectualise’ it<sup>3</sup>, seems quite foreign to the Aboriginal work of keeping knowledge traditions strong. It doesn’t seem to help that much with the work which Aboriginal parents and grandparents are doing towards young people’s induction into the knowledge traditions which have kept their family identity together over the generations. This is of course as true in the city as it is in remote homelands.

### **Uses of Digital technologies in Indigenous Knowledge Work**

Aboriginal people are using digital technologies in their own ongoing work of creating and re-creating culture through collective memory, in the form of digital resources. For example, some people are using recordings of ancestral songs originally performed by people now deceased, and repatriated from archives in Canberra. Some of these are organised using special software

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<sup>2</sup> For a report on all the archives of Aboriginal knowledge we have found in the Top End of Australia, see [www.cdu.edu.au/ik](http://www.cdu.edu.au/ik)

<sup>3</sup> See for example <http://www.waoe.org/africanknowledge/encyclopaedia.html> for a detailed plan which includes intellectualising African knowledge.

developed for managing digital resources like iTunes. Other people are making digital collections of their own photos which they want to keep safe and show only to their immediately family, and use them to share stories which strengthen family identity. Some people are using digitised maps adding names and photos which were generated or collected to support Native Title claims, to tell their children their history. They use them to teach young people the Aboriginal names of places when they only know the English names.

People are using digitised version of old photos repatriated from museums and missionary organisations to piece together the histories of their families. Others make video and audio recordings of ceremonies to take home to show those who couldn't attend, and to allow very old people to comment on how well performed and received it was, and remind people of the old connections which make it true. One man made a video of himself standing on his land telling the story of that land for other people (Aboriginal and nonAboriginal) who haven't been there and may not know the full story of its history, its ownership and who is taking care of it.

Other Aboriginal people are using digital technologies at school, bringing together groups of elders to tell stories of the land for children who haven't heard them yet, and making DVDs and other multimedia educational resources.

### **How the knowledge resources are organised and controlled**

The local Aboriginal digital knowledge resources we have come across generally belong principally to one person rather than to a group or community organisation, and other people are

given access to them under particular conditions in particular contexts. There are strong traditional principles of rights and responsibilities which govern their management. The owners and makers show a strong commitment to identifying the right people in right places telling their own stories. Individuals develop their own file management systems at their personal or family level and are uncomfortable about the idea of having all the knowledge of a community put into the one database. This is not so much because they don't want people to have access to their own resources, but rather because they undertake to manage their resources properly. Equally they are keen to avoid being held responsible in any way for the management of, and particularly the access to the resources of others.<sup>4</sup>

People use the digital resources in a social context as props or artefacts, in the same way that they would use nondigital resources like paintings, photos, diagrams, ceremonial objects, and of course the land itself and natural phenomena in talking about and representing themselves and their histories, and making agreements.

In some contexts, this work is just people chatting together, reminiscing, enjoying being able to look at, represent and listen to traces of history and build the collective memory of the group. In other contexts, the use of Aboriginal digital resources is serious business, making claims about ownership, about rights and responsibilities, and appropriate behaviour. In these cases the ways that the resources are identified and validated, the way they are accessed and displayed and the ways assemblages are put together and used in context, is a crucial part of the knowledge production process, and negotiations over resources. People tend to be focussed on keeping the narratives of their history and identity alive, so they are more interested in storing videos, sound

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<sup>4</sup> There is a contrast here with file management and database systems in place like knowledge centres and land management organizations, where people pool resources across these family/clan boundaries.

files, and photographs than ‘information’ about particular places or species. We find mostly audio, video and images, not much text.

### **Aboriginal law and digital technology**

Aboriginal digital objects in Aboriginal hands are a special case of Intellectual property in that they are not yet caught up in the white Australian knowledge economy. They can be used in an entirely Aboriginal social context. They can join in the entirely Aboriginal work of creating Aboriginal culture anew using Aboriginal rules and processes for making and validating claims to the truth. When they do this they are subject to Aboriginal law long before they are implicated in Australian law.

The computer doesn’t contain knowledge so much as traces of previous episodes of knowledge production. It has memory, but memories are not enough to keep knowledge, language and culture alive. Each new generation needs to learn how to perform (act, talk, dance, sing, paint, justify, elaborate ...) their world into a new existence day by day. We all use memory resources to perform that work. Some of our resources are digital, and others are not. But one way or another we need to make representations, and share them with people who will watch, think, assess, and pass judgement.

Many elders are concerned that important distinctions which need to be made between groups of people in ceremonial practice, song or art, get blurred and confused when young people don’t get to visit land regularly. The land contains artefacts, memories and traces of previous knowledge-

making episodes, just as a database. The land can be understood to have memory as a computer has memory. Digital databases with map interfaces seem to help tie stories to places.<sup>5</sup> The work of Aboriginal cultural production, does not lie *inside* digital objects, but rather in the *performances and negotiations* over those objects. The cultural, political and religious work lies in their assessment and exchange. In the same way that complex negotiations always precede ceremonial performance, similar negotiations surround the production and display of Aboriginal digital resources.

### **Australian Law, and Aboriginal digital environments**

When people's stories are mixed up and put into an archive – say about plants and their uses as food or medicine - two things happen: First, the information is usually no longer much use in the work that old people do transferring knowledge traditions to young people. The data have been stripped away from their underlying stories and the connections which embedded them in Aboriginal knowledge traditions. Second, the intellectual property gets all mixed up (in both Aboriginal and Australian systems of law). Some people try to get around that by saying that the IP belongs to the community as a whole, but this may not be the best way to solve it. Until (and probably after) community ownership is properly negotiated and ratified, each piece of information or each digital resource needs to have an owner.

In Australian law, trade marks (like Nike or CocaCola), patents on inventions (like a cane toad trap), works of art (like musical recordings and bark paintings) are all protected under Intellectual

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<sup>5</sup> See for example [http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/ik/db\\_larrakia.html](http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/ik/db_larrakia.html)

Property law. You can't start making runners and call them Nikes. Nor can you make a copy of someone's painting and sell it on a tea towel or carpet. IP law has sometimes been used successfully to protect Aboriginal ownership of Aboriginal cultural products. This view of rights over Aboriginal culture as *proprietary*, implies some sort of a compromise of the true relationship between people and their natural/cultural worlds. It's like the old and very significant argument that is often made, that in Aboriginal law, the idea that *people belong to the land* is more important and fundamental and in fact prior to the idea that *land belongs to people*. The land is as much a result of the ancestral creative work, as are the peoples who belong to various places, and their languages, songs and art. The notion of property in Australian law does not do justice to Aboriginal notions of relatedness, origins and identity. Neither the land nor the people comes first. Both are effects of something prior and more fundamental.

If my knowledge resources are in a large database belonging at least in part to some government or nongovernment agency, then it is the content of the database which is subject to legal discussion. In Australian law, it is simply a technical matter of ownership, nothing to do with ethics, politics or culture. Talking about Bromley the teddy bear who climbed Uluru, Steve Gray (2005) points out that "when a photographer takes an image, that image is still his or her intellectual property. The fact that it may offend Anangu religious or cultural sensibilities is secondary" (p.38). He also makes clear that giant databases, like one proposed by the World Bank, have been seen as a solution to the protection of Indigenous expression because it puts all the issues in the public arena

with well-funded legal support. Attention to the ways such archives are used could give rise to a new or extended legal definition of intellectual property.<sup>6</sup>

If however I avoid putting my digital resources into a larger collection and keep them for myself on my own computer (as seems to be happening in the Aboriginal contexts we have identified), the question of rights and access is not so problematic (Daes, 2004). It only comes up when I agree to select some of my resources and to share them with you in a particular time and place under circumstances to which we both agree: *a contract*.

That part of Australian law which is referred to as contract law, has in fact according to Gray been a more useful tool than IP law, for the protection of indigenous knowledge and resources. The benefit I may gain through using your resources is governed by a contract or agreement which you and I make, and which can be argued over in court if I misuse it. This law seems in some ways more consistent with the ways in which Aboriginal people work in their digital (and other) cultural contexts. The main problem with contract benefit sharing is that the contracts don't provide any protection against *third parties*. If someone takes and sells what you have given me, you are not able to claim any rights over what he has done with it.

There is a further problem. If someone designs a database, and I put my digital resources into it, and then I use the database software to bring those resources together in a particular way for a particular purpose, the logic of that configuration may in fact be understood as part of the copyright

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<sup>6</sup> See for example <http://www.waoe.org/africanknowledge/encyclopaedia.html>. But Erica Daes, from the United Nations, in a lecture called the impact of Globalization on Indigenous Intellectual Property and Cultures, [http://www.hreoc.gov.au/speeches/social\\_justice/indigenous\\_ip.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/speeches/social_justice/indigenous_ip.html) expresses grave doubts about the idea.

of the programmer, and therefore the arrangement doesn't necessarily belong to me. The court might find that it's not my IP.

## **Conclusion**

In years to come, many of these issues will be decided in the courts, in reference to Australian law and international conventions. From these decisions may emerge a coherent principle which can be depended upon, or a set of amendments to protect Aboriginal knowledge in all its many forms. If we look at the ways in which Aboriginal people in their own contexts are currently dealing with their own digital resources in their own ways, (rather than in hybrid contexts where two laws apply) we may find that the Aboriginal law which is already at work there, is more recognisable through Australian contract law, than it is through Australian intellectual property law. The interactivity which is at the bottom of both Aboriginal law and of Australian contract law may provide the way ahead.

Whichever way it turns out, people working within Australian law to protect Aboriginal knowledge need to look carefully at how traditional law in local contexts is already starting to govern ways in which digital environments are configured and managed. A careful analysis might help with the development of a law reform agenda and a legal practice which is equally committed to protect from fracture "the skeleton of principle" of Aboriginal law.

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# **CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE**

## **Would The Real Community Of Practice Please Stand Up!**

**Ian Falk**

**John Guenther**

### **1 Introduction**

This paper presents findings of research into teachers' experience of professional development in two schools in Darwin, Northern Territory. Part of the Northern Territory government's 'Building better schools' initiative is about establishing 'Professional Learning Communities' (PLCs). According to NT DEET (2005):

The project aims to establish Professional Learning Communities for teachers to develop and share models of best practice. Networks of communities will be established across the Territory to support teachers.

This project, funded by Charles Darwin University, explores teachers' perceptions of professional development (PD) in terms of what is effective for them. It attempts to determine whether these professional learning experiences include elements of professional learning communities. It therefore informs the discussion around the implementation of the 'Building better schools' initiative by providing an indication of the breadth of PD experiences of staff and their likely acceptance of PLC models. It also provides characteristics that differentiate traditional models from PLC models, which may then be used as benchmarks for assessing the 'fit' of programs that may be recommended for funding.

An important component of this project is the literature review, which is deliberately designed to be extensive and forms a major component of the paper. The literature is used as a starting point for identifying practices and characteristics of effective professional learning programs of all types. These characteristics are then divided into those that apply to PLCs and those that apply to traditional learning models. This division of characteristics is then used to inform the coding and analysis framework.

## **2 Literature review**

The literature presented here reviews several aspects of professional development with a particular focus on professional learning communities. It begins with consideration of the nature of effective professional development generally and proceeds with an assessment of the benefits and drawbacks of traditional models of PD. The literature review then explores what is understood by PLC models and what characterises them. The section concludes with a comparison of traditional and PLC models.

### **2.1 The nature of effective professional development**

Drawing on the findings of Fullan (1991), Little (1993), Cook (1996), Connolly (1998), and Hawley and Valli (1999), Downes et al. (2001) found that ‘professional development needs to be integrated with a comprehensive change process that deals with the full range of impediments to and facilitators of student and teacher learning’ (p. 19). To be effective, professional development must be sustained, ongoing and supported by modelling coaching and collective problem solving in specific areas of practice (Kinnaman, 1990; CERI 1998; Downes et al. 2001). As it is directed

towards teachers' intellectual development and leadership, it needs to be designed and directed by teachers, incorporating the best principles of adult learning and involving shared decisions designed to improve the school (Inservice Teacher Education Project Committee, 1988; Hawley & Valli 1999; Downes et al. 2001). It needs to be participant-driven, to engage teachers in actual tasks of teaching, assessment, observation and reflection (CERI 1998), and collaborative and interactional (Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1989; Greeno 1998; Hawley & Valli 1999; Bransford, Brown & Cocking 2000).

The literature claims evidence of a positive correlation between teacher professionalism (including the teacher as learner role) and improved student learning outcomes (Groundwater-Smith 1998; Smith 1999; Delannoy 2000; Mitchell & Cubey 2003; Borko 2004). Guskey and Sparks (1996) emphasise the importance of a systemic approach with a clear focus on explicit student learning outcomes (Guskey 2000). Effective professional development is therefore closely linked with teachers' work with their students (Downes et al. 2001), and assists teachers to meet the future needs of students with different learning styles and differing socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (Mitchell & Cubey 2003).

There is increasing attention being given to the role of new information and communication technologies in teacher professional development. This includes the use of telecommunications to provide channels of communication for networking and mentoring, facilitation and support, and the use of online professional development courses and online curriculum projects that have professional development embedded within them (Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik & Soloway 1998; Downes et al. 2001). However, more evidence is needed to support the claims about the effectiveness of the use of such media (Downes et al. 2001).

There is widespread consensus in the literature about the nature of best practice in teacher professional development. The Inservice Teacher Education Project Committee's 1988 report, *Teachers Learning: Improving Australian schools through in-service teacher training and development*, listed principles of good practice in professional development as incorporating:

- Adult Learning principles, including recognition of prior learning and of contextual and support issues;
- Delivery Modes that recognise the value of 'innovation focused' and 'action research' strategies;
- Setting and Focus, using the school as a pivotal point;
- Leadership by principals in schools and also collaborative leadership;
- Joint planning and collaborative control by stakeholders;
- Support for teacher commitment and for a culture of ongoing learning;
- Applying results of educational research in knowledge fields;
- Assessment of the impact of professional development on students and their learning, on teachers and their teaching, and on the school itself.

These principles were echoed to a large extent by Crowther and Gaffney (1993) and Loudon (1994), also supporting action research, and with more focus on bringing together teams of classroom teachers and on preparation by participants.

Characteristics of effective professional development were summed up by Mitchell and Cubey (2003), researching professional development in an early childhood education context in New Zealand. **Table 1** below, summarises these characteristics. Mitchell and Cubey found that highly

skilled, knowledgeable, and critically aware professional development advisers had a critical role.

These advisers

play key roles in establishing goals, observing teachers/educators, offering knowledge about alternative practice, giving feedback and planning. Intensive input seems necessary at the start of a programme, while at later stages minimal support only may be needed. However, an enduring role is for the professional development adviser to critique and challenge pedagogy. (p. xii)

**Table 1. Characteristics of effective professional development linked to enhanced pedagogy and children’s learning in early childhood education settings (adapted from Mitchell & Cubey 2003)**

<p>The professional development incorporates participants’ own aspirations, skills, knowledge and understanding into the learning context. Programmes introduce new ideas and provide opportunity for participants to question their experiences and views, and not simply validate them.</p>	<p>The professional development provides theoretical and content knowledge and information about alternative practices. This may be generic or content specific, such as generic areas of co-constructing learning, scaffolding, learning dispositions, and specific areas such as early literacy, mathematical and scientific understanding,</p>	<p>Participants are involved in investigating pedagogy within their own early childhood settings. Investigative methods, such as action research, are useful. An external professional development adviser or researcher engages in the investigation.</p>	<p>Participants analyse data from their own settings. Revelation of discrepant data is a mechanism to invoke revised understanding</p>
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	creativity.		
<p>Critical reflection enabling participants to investigate and challenge assumptions and extend their thinking is a core aspect. Some conditions that encourage critical reflection: 1) collaboration with others and being exposed to their views. These views include views of colleagues, professional development advisers, parents, and children; 2) using deeper or different theoretical understanding; 3) teachers/educators thinking about their own thinking, e.g. through use of journals and diaries.</p>	<p>Professional development supports educational practice that is inclusive of diversity</p>	<p>The professional development helps participants to change educational practice, beliefs, understanding, and/or attitudes</p>	<p>The professional development helps participants to gain awareness of their own thinking, actions, and influence</p>

The key message from the literature may be summed up in the words from a Commonwealth of Australia (2000) document, 'Teachers for the 21st Century: Making a Difference': professional development is effective

where it is identified and implemented within the school context to meet the needs of their teachers and students, for the continuous improvement of professional practice . . . educational systems and schools [need to] embed professional development effectively into conventional work practices. (Commonwealth of Australia 2000, p. 11)

However, as McRae, Ainsworth, Groves, Rowland and Zbar (2001) pointed out, sets of principles do not, by themselves, lead to good teacher professional development. Despite recognition of its importance, and despite its high cost (McRae et al. 2001; Borko 2004), professional development is generally considered inadequate (Borko 2004; Sykes 1996). This is largely because the consensus in the literature that it needs to be integrated and sustained is rarely reflected in practice. Hawley and Valli (1999) noted: 'the bad news is that few of these principles are common to professional development programs in schools and colleges, and the cases where most, much less all, of the principles are being implemented simultaneously are rare indeed' (p. 145).

## **2.2 Benefits and drawbacks of 'traditional' models**

Traditional models of professional development tend to be regarded in terms of formal education activities, such as courses or workshops. School administrators release teachers for a half or full day and hold a PD or in-service program that may or may not be relevant to teachers' professional development needs. The programs may have experts who speak to all teachers on a topic or they may consist of simultaneous workshops offered by trainers recruited from other districts, the university, or the state education department. Teachers listen and leave with some practical tips or

some useful materials. There is seldom any follow-up to the experience and subsequent in-services may address entirely different sets of topics. These factors limit the effectiveness of traditional models (McRae et al. 2001).

However, the literature outlined in previous sections of this review agrees that professional development, in order to be integral to teaching and not ancillary to it, must centre on the classrooms where teaching and learning take place. Moreover, it must provide the 'direct help and support' for teachers' continued learning. Modelling new pedagogies in non-specific and decontextualised ways has been demonstrated not to work (US Department of Education 1999). There is now a trend of moving away from past models of professional development to new models that embed professional development into the daily lives of teachers.

### **2.3 Communities of practice models**

There is a growing body of literature on what is variously termed communities of practice, learning communities, teacher communities, teacher networks, and research circles. Interest in these models has come with recognition of the role of communities to support teacher learning and of the concept that professionals learn best in interaction with their peers (Vygotsky 1978; Lieberman & Miller 1991; Little 1993; Newman & Wehlage 1995; Borke 2004). The models 'profit from synergies' (Kilpatrick, Barrett & Jones 2003, p. 2). Stein, Smith and Silver (1999) have suggested that development of teacher communities of professional practice formed the outlines of a new paradigm for teacher professional development. Downes et al. (2001) described this new paradigm as 'involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than individual teachers, with support from both inside and outside of setting' (Downes et al. 2001, p. 6).

Models of teacher professional development based on the concept of communities of practice have been developed by Wenger (1998a &b). Lave and Wenger (1991) first proposed that learning in the workplace occurs through enculturation into a community of practice. In schools, informal communities of practice serve as the background to building professional learning communities (Hough, Paine & Austin 1997). Au (2002) describes teachers' professional learning as 'the process of developing and linking communities of practice' (p. 226). By making links between informal staff groupings, a school community has an increased capacity to make better use of resources, build stronger networks, support emerging leaders, and represent community interests with increased confidence and knowledge, and in turn the capacity to influence its own future.

Wenger defines communities of practice as 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and who learn to do it better as a result of their ongoing interactions' (2005, para. 3). 'By engaging directly in the production of knowledge with your colleagues, you are deepening your sense of professional identity while at the same time improving your practice' (2005, para. 10). According to Wenger's theory, members of a community of practice, or practitioners, develop a shared repertoire of resources through their sustained interaction over time, and this shared practice is what differentiates them from other communities or groups. The community's collective knowledge is constructed largely through informal narrative discourse between community members. Through interaction the community of practice sustains itself; novices initially engage with mentors and peers in the community as peripheral participants in practice, and later participate as experienced actors (Lave & Wenger 1991).

Site visits are important in the model, allowing practitioners to see how their peers are doing things. 'Enabling this kind of peer-to-peer contact engages practitioners in reflecting about their work, and enriches the repertoire of ideas out there' (Wenger 2005, para. 11). On-site visits are

mixed with online interaction, which ‘enables practitioners to negotiate with each other on a more ongoing basis’ (2005, para.11).

According to Wenger (1998a), communities of practice are characterised by three features. First is mutual engagement: members have in common their work and they define their working practices themselves. Secondly, communities of practice are formed around a joint enterprise. Members share a common mission or objectives, which are continually negotiated. Thirdly, they have a shared repertoire, akin to what Gee (1990) has termed Discourses – a shared set of words, tools, ways of doing things, which are part of their practice. ‘Communities of practice typically are organic, devoid of formal organizational hierarchical structures, and rely on informal leadership from their members’ (Wideman & Owston 2003, Introduction, para. 2). Members fit into several categories and assume various roles: a coordinator, who organizes events and connects community members; a core group of active participants in forums and meetings who assume some leadership roles; an active group of frequent, but not regular participants; and peripheral participants, members who occasional take part and others who learn from observation (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder 2002).

The development of a community of practice begins with a stage Wenger calls the potential phase, with people facing similar situations seeing the benefit of working with each other (Wenger 1998b). During the coalescing phase, members come to recognize the potential of working together and begin to explore how to accomplish this. At the third stage, called the active phase, the community of practice becomes firmly entrenched as members engage in joint activities, create artifacts, and adapt to changing circumstances. A fourth stage, the dispersed phase, may see members no longer as intensely engaged, but still in touch. Activity wanes during the final stage, called the memorable phase, and participants remember it as a significant part of their identities.

Although communities of practice are viewed primarily as a means to improve learning, there is some evidence to suggest that they promote innovation, risk taking, trying new approaches, and knowledge creation, particularly in business settings (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder 2002). They are also seen as a way to help members master challenges, gain access to expertise, provide a forum for expanding skills and expertise, help members develop confidence in their approach to problems, enhance meaningfulness of professional activity through the sense of belonging to some meaningful endeavour, develop increased professional identity, and reduce teacher isolation (Wenger et al. 2002).

In the research literature there is ongoing discussion about the nature of communities of practice and the so-called 'learning communities' upon which they are based, and the impact on both teacher professional learning and students' learning outcomes (Boston, 1995; Longworth 1999; Davis & Sumara 2001; Rogoff, Turkanis & Bartlett 2001; CRLRA 2002; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002). Downes et al. (2001) noted that professional learning communities are: easy to set up but difficult to sustain (Lieberman 2000); need particular conditions if they are to operate effectively (Hough & Paine 1997; Grossman, Wineburg & Woolworth 2001); work best at the local level (site-based communities); and are less likely to succeed when dispersed and virtual (Schlager, Fusco & Schank 2000). Elmore, Peterson, and McCarthy (1996), Fullan (2001), and Wideman and Owston (2003) found evidence providing strong support for Wenger's assertion that communities of practice are vital to sustaining and expanding the momentum for change. Wixson and Yochum (2004) found consistent evidence of improved instruction and student literacy learning in communities of practice contexts. Computer-mediated conversation provides a tool by which teachers can extend their support network and deepen their reflection (Johanson, Norland,

Olson, Huth, & Bodensteiner 1999; Pennington & Graham 2002; Wilkinson & Pennington 2002; Singer & Zeni 2004; Hung, Chee, Hedberg & Seng 2005).

In practice, many communities are work-group ones (Borko 2004), focused on a limited number of subject areas and grade levels. The Community of Teacher Learners project (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth 2001) brought together English and history teachers at an American urban high school with university-based educators to read books, discuss teaching and learning, and design an interdisciplinary humanities curriculum. The QUASAR (Quantitative Understanding: Amplifying Student Achievement and Reasoning) project funded and studied site-based professional development programs in mathematics teaching in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Borko 2004). At each QUASAR school, the mathematics teachers worked with resource partners (usually mathematics educators from a local university) to develop and implement innovative curricula and instructional practices. The QUASAR project staff who studied these programs concluded that professional learning communities were central to fostering teacher change and student learning (Borko 2004).

#### **2.4 Traditional models compared to Communities of practice models**

There is to date no body of research comparing professional learning communities with traditional professional development learning approaches. One reason for this may be that the evolving nature of professional learning practices means that there is some blurring of models. This discussion makes an assumption that there are elements of models, which are discrete and that these discrete differences are what differentiate traditional from professional learning community models. It is acknowledged that there may be other non-traditional models that cannot be described under a framework of a PLC. These other models are not the focus of this research.

It can be stated, however, that traditional models, especially if they include modules from independent providers, are seen as expensive (Zbar 1999; McRae et al. 2001) and largely inadequate because they are piecemeal and not integrated and systemic (US Department of Education 1999; Guskey 2000; Downes et al. 2001; McRae et al. 2001).

On the other hand, communities of practice models are believed to work more effectively because of the synergies of interaction among peers (Wenger et al. 2002; Kilpatrick et al. 2003), and because they are localised (Borko 2004). But the development of teacher communities can be difficult and time-consuming work (Stein et al. 1999; Lieberman 2000; Grossman et al. 2001).

Retallick (1997) distinguishes between a traditional models which involve attending courses, seminars or training programs ... and a workplace learning concept of professional development as building a learning organisation. In the latter sense, professional development is integral to the job, it is part of work and it derives its meaning and rationale from the nature of the occupation. (p. 21)

The implications of the view that schools are learning communities are profound for teacher professional development. One of the most important of these is that learning can, and must, be part of all teachers' daily activity (McRae et al. 2001).

While there is no doubt some overlap between the characteristics of both traditional and professional learning community types of professional development the literature points to some differences. These differences, discussed in the sections above, are summarised in **Table 2**. The methodology draws on this list as a starting point for identifying aspects of teachers' experiences that are both positive and negative.

**Table 2. Summary of professional development characteristics for both traditional and PLC types**

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<i>Characteristics of traditional PD</i>	<i>Characteristics of PLCs</i>
Seen to be expensive	Synergies of interaction among peers
'piecemeal', not integrated	Localised
Integral to the job, extension of work	Time consuming
Formal activities, workshops	Focus of shared knowledge rather than individuals
Seldom follow-up	Increased capacity to make better use of resources
Need for focus on classroom practices	Build networks
May or may not be relevant to professional learning needs	Support emerging leaders
	Capacity to influence community's own future
	People who share a concern or passion
	Deepening sense of professional identity
	Shared repertoire of resources
	Site visits, enriching repertoire of ideas
	Mutual engagement
	Joint enterprise
	Organic, no formal organisation, informal leadership

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### **3 Methodology**

This research uses storying and narrative analysis in conjunction with a semi-structured interview approach as the main strategy of qualitative inquiry (Creswell 2003:183; Fontana & Frey 2000; Patton 2002:115). Interviews were conducted at two primary schools in the Darwin region with six teachers involved from each school. The interviews were conducted during August and September 2005.

Using a purposeful sampling technique (Creswell 2003:185) schools were selected by negotiation with the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) and schools that were known to the project team. Participants were selected by principals after an invitation to participate was given to staff at both schools. The interview questions were designed to be open-ended with as much opportunity as possible for full and broad exploration of the topics. The purpose of the questions was to elicit responses that would demonstrate the range of professional development experiences encountered by teaching staff. Staff were asked to describe their ideal model of professional development with examples and to compare these examples with others that were less than ideal. A focus of the questions was to explore the impact of the professional development experiences on relationships. The significant limitation of the research is the small number of schools and interviewees involved. The generaliseability of the findings needs to be viewed on this basis.

Consistent with the narrative approach, interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. The transcriptions were offered to staff involved for error checking as part of the validation process (Creswell 2003:196). The resulting texts were then added to an NVivo™ project, which was then used to code, thematise and analyse responses according to standard text and content analysis

techniques (Bernard 2000:444-455; Silverman 2000). Coding was structured around two main groups: ‘what works’ and ‘what does not work’. Essentially these were positive and negative professional development experiences—ideal and less than ideal. Coding patterns were categorised according to emerging themes as they arose out of the data. Where possible these themes were matched to characteristics of professional development identified in the literature. Analysis was carried out primarily using tools available within Nvivo™ qualitative analysis software. Some additional analysis was carried out using chi-squared statistical tests in Microsoft Excel™.

## **4 Findings and discussion**

This section firstly tabulates the results of the research according to the coding framework developed for programs that ‘work’ and those that ‘do not work’. Secondly, it goes on to compare the results for programs that were closer to a PLC type of learning with those that were more traditional. Finally, the section discusses these results, with a selection of quotes from interviews and points to several implications that arise from the findings.

### **4.1 Results**

Respondents described 15 different programs as examples of their ideal model of professional development and 11 programs as less than ideal. Some programs were identified by more than one respondent. **Table 3** represents a summary of responses related to teachers’ ideal PD programs. The largest number of responses related to the ‘practical, hands on’ nature of PD programs with 18 per cent of all coding references. Those characteristics identified in the literature as elements of professional learning communities are marked with an asterisk (\*). In this group the largest single group of responses relates to the development of professional identity with 8 per cent of all

responses. Overall, 55 per cent of coding references were aligned to professional learning community characteristics identified in the literature.

**Table 3. Coding categories: ‘what works’ for teaching staff in professional development**

<i>Coding categories, what works</i>	<i>Total coding references</i>	<i>Per cent of all coding references</i>
PD builds professional identity, is seen to be valued and builds confidence*	20	8%
Sharing of knowledge among staff within school*	17	7%
Interaction among staff within PD session*	19	8%
Working together, collaborating in PD*	15	6%
Opportunity for relationship building*	15	6%
Visiting other sites, seeing what other schools are doing*	8	3%
PD promotes innovation, new ideas*	4	2%
Networking among colleagues within and outside the school*	16	6%
PD is driven by teachers*	5	2%
PD is offered on a voluntary basis*	6	2%
Learning happens informally*	11	4%
Staff are interested, passionate about topic	12	5%
PD offered depends on needs	6	2%

PD is fun and enjoyable	8	3%
PD is adequately funded, relief staff are provided	6	2%
PD makes good use of time, doesn't interfere with family, is at an appropriate time	12	5%
School leadership supports and directs PD	24	10%
Practical, hands on and relevant to the classroom	44	18%
Total	248	100%
<b><i>PLC model characteristics*</i></b>	<b><i>136</i></b>	<b><i>55%</i></b>

**Table 4** shows characteristics of professional development that made experiences of programs less than ideal. More than half of all responses relate to the first four of the 13 categories shown. The largest group of teachers (20 per cent) described programs negatively in terms of 'sitting and listening'. Almost as many references (19 per cent) were made to programs that were run at the wrong time or were overly lengthy in duration. Being 'told to go' and a lack of relevance to the classroom or school were highlighted in another 20 per cent of responses. Respondents described these programs as typically 'chalk and talk' with PowerPoint slides and little or no opportunity for interaction.

**Table 4. Coding categories: 'what does not work for teaching staff in professional development**

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<i>Coding categories, what does not work</i>	<i>Number of coding references</i>	<i>Per cent of all coding references</i>
Sitting and listening	14	20%
The timing of PD does not suit or is inappropriate	13	19%
PD is mandatory, being told to go	7	10%
PD has little or no application to the school or classroom	7	10%
The quality of the presenter was poor	5	7%
There was too much information, could not take it all in	5	7%
PD interferes with classroom activities/programming	4	6%
The PD was of no interest, boring	4	6%
The PD did not offer opportunities for building relationships	3	4%
Content that is forgettable	2	3%
PD interferes with personal or family life	2	3%
Resources are not available to implement learnings	2	3%
The venue for PD was not suitable	1	1%
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>69</i></b>	<b><i>100%</i></b>

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**Table 5** divides the results shown in **Table 3** into three groups. The first group is a summary of those responses where the majority of characteristics described as attributes of a program matched those identified as PLC characteristics in the literature. The second group is a summary of those responses where up to half of characteristics described did not match those identified in the

literature as PLC types. These have been labelled 'traditional'. The third group is a summary of responses about ideal models of PD that were not tied to a specific program.

**Table 5. Breakdown of PD characteristics by type of program, together with generic responses**

<i>Characteristic of 'ideal' PD</i>	<i>PLC type responses</i>	<i>Per cent of all PLC type responses</i>	<i>Traditional type responses</i>	<i>Per cent of all traditional type responses</i>	<i>Generic responses</i>	<i>Per cent of all generic responses</i>
PD builds professional identity	7	5%	7	10%	6	15%
Sharing of knowledge among staff	12	9%	1	1%	4	10%
Interaction among staff within PD	11	8%	6	9%	2	5%
Working together, collaborating in PD	14	10%	1	1%	0	0%
Opportunity for relationship building	11	8%	2	3%	2	5%
Visiting other sites	6	4%	2	3%	0	0%
PD promotes	2	1%	1	1%	1	2%

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innovation						
Networking among colleagues	16	12%	0	0%	0	0%
PD is driven by teachers	3	2%	2	3%	0	0%
PD is offered on a voluntary basis	2	1%	3	4%	1	2%
Learning happens informally	5	4%	2	3%	4	10%
Staff are interested, passionate about topic	6	4%	3	4%	3	7%
PD offered depends on needs	2	1%	3	4%	1	2%
PD is fun and enjoyable	3	2%	5	7%	0	0%
PD is funded	4	3%	1	1%	1	2%
PD makes good use of time	2	1%	5	7%	5	12%
School leadership supports and directs PD	11	8%	6	9%	7	17%
Practical, hands on and relevant to the	20	15%	20	29%	4	10%

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classroom						
Total	137		70		41	
<b><i>PLC model</i></b>	<b>89</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>49%</b>
<b><i>characteristics</i></b>						

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Chi-squared analysis reveals that for this sample of teachers there is a significant difference between the ‘traditional type’ and the ‘PLC type’ of program such that those describing a PLC type are more likely to report the range of associated characteristics found in the literature than those who described a traditional PD ( $p < .05$ ). A closer examination of the individual components of the ‘PLC type’ shows that there are four elements that contribute to the significant difference:

- Sharing of knowledge among staff within the school;
- Working together, collaborating in PD;
- Opportunity for relationship building; and
- Networking among colleagues within and outside the school.

#### **4.2 Discussion and implications**

The results of this research demonstrate a diverse array of professional learning experiences. While none of those experiences could be described as professional learning communities according the full range of characteristics found in the literature, elements of professional learning communities were described by respondents to varying degrees. The teachers that were interviewed drew from their professional learning experiences and while they all understood the terminology associated with professional learning communities their experience was dominated by a range of traditional

type professional development workshops. In other words their frame of reference in most cases was restricted by their experience, which to a large extent excluded PLC experiences. The results suggest that before PLCs are more widely promoted and introduced into a strategic professional development framework, they must be first explained and modelled before the value of such learning can be fully appreciated. The danger if this does not occur, is that PLCs will be seen to be just another way of doing PD workshops.

Those programs that were described as being less than ideal were largely dismissed for their professional development value because they were mandatory, 'boring', lacked interactivity and were organised at inappropriate times. The failure of these programs is less to do with their nature as either 'traditional' or 'PLC' types and more to do with their failure to address basic adult learning principles. The following three quotes are typical of comments that reflect these views.

I5: [I didn't like it because] you are told 'we are going', we are not given the choice. You might end up going to a PD that you don't find interesting or that you don't find a benefit for yourself... but there was a behaviour management one where [the principal] knew would be really good for me and I was in denial about and it was very good for me because it was something that I needed to work on, [but] the style of how it was presented didn't suit me, it was very much stand at the front preach, preach, preach, bang, bang, bang, no interaction, no networking, nothing.

I8: I walked out and I wondered why I go to these things. It was the same deal and there are so many; the same chalk and talk business.

I4: I have been to one where we sat on a Friday afternoon and the person basically talked at us and we felt very tired and this person was trying to get responses out of us and nobody wanted to contribute and they were looking away when they were trying to get people to be involved. We were told that we had to go.

These findings, though not directly related to the study of PLCs, point to the need for better quality assurance for traditional PD workshops. This could take the form of post workshop participant assessment of presenters and presentations. It may also require a re-think of the timing and delivery mode of workshops in order to avoid problems associated with after-school PD sessions.

Many aspects of the 'traditional' type of PD were appreciated and valued by the teachers. In particular PDs that were practical, hands on and had direct application to the classroom or school were considered most effective. This characteristic was valued regardless of the mode of delivery or level of interactivity. The analysis shown in **Table 5** shows that while in this sample of teachers a larger proportion of teachers describing traditional types of PD identified 'practical, hands on' as a factor that contributed to effective PD compared to those describing PLC types, the difference was not statistically significant. The following quote typifies this view:

I12: What works for me is practical basically at the end of the day. Anything that is related directly to teaching in the classroom and practical hands-on type experience is probably the two best that I have been involved in. One... relates to classroom assessment, the common writing tasks where we actually had to do the assessment and it was all day writing assessments and that is hands-on and you've got a real good feel of what you've got to do. So anything that directly relates to my classroom practice is what I consider to be valuable PD experiences.

Other aspects of PD that were appreciated by all respondents similarly, regardless of the type were: support and direction from school leaders; good timing of PD; interactivity; and the way the program contributed to teachers' confidence and value as a staff member. The direction that the principal provided, especially to newer and younger teachers was particularly appreciated. The

following quote from a relatively new teacher highlights the value placed on this kind of support and direction:

I9: When [the principal] put that information in my pigeonhole I took it straight out I said 'sorry I don't want to do this'. He just looked at me like 'thanks a lot!'. But I'm so glad I didn't, I left it a week and I saw someone who had done it and they said no, if [principal's name] has given it to you, you take it, it's really good and I said 'is it too late?' and he said 'no, no that's good, you're in'.

The above results suggest that there is an important role for traditional approaches to PD where there is practical application and where the approach is top-down, rather than self-directed or teacher driven. This is not to say that learning that takes place in PLCs is not practical, but it may require a longer time frame to organise. Further, the need for particular learnings may not be immediately obvious to a work team at the school level but it may be critically important in the eyes of more senior staff within the education system.

In terms of the principal's role in leading a school's professional development strategies, a PLC approach will necessarily require a different style of leadership than the traditional approach. A PLC approach arguably requires a more facilitative, supportive role than might be demanded in a traditional PD environment. Principals, assistant principals and school administrators, unfamiliar with a PLC approach to may need to be provided with specific skills and training in order for staff to more fully take advantage of a PLC model. Apart from leadership development skills, administrators and principals may need to reorient their thinking about PD participation and outcomes from short term, one-off workshops, to year long programs.

The findings shown in **Table 5** demonstrate that the key differences in types of professional development were related to: *relationship building*; *collaborative learning*; *sharing of knowledge*;

and *networking among colleagues* within and outside the school. One teacher for example, described a PD day organised by a literacy committee at her school:

I9: There were people doing reading, listening, speaking we divided it into groups and we had little program and we just went with that. It was only like 20 minutes at a time, are two of us got together to do it... I had to go away and look at what I was doing and learn about it and present it but I found that I got to understand what I was doing that way. Reading, comprehension.

Q: Where did you go to for information?

I9: We accessed all sorts of information, support books, so it was good and I was working with another teacher who was into this stuff as well and we talked about it as well so when I had all my information together and I saw her she said 'yes that's right' and worked out which one we were going to do and what angle we were going to take.

This illustration highlights the collaborative, knowledge sharing nature of the PLC type. Several respondents describing PLC type programs indicated that the programs were good because they could 'bounce' ideas off each other. For example one respondent who described learning that was facilitated through a professional association described it as follows:

I7: ...there's not people working at the same year level that you can have that conversation with so having the [professional association] you get together and there is a lot of the general chitchat that you might have in the staff room. Like how are you going to deal with this child or getting fee payments, we talk about these all the time. How are you organising your committee? All that sort of stuff, because you are it. Because you are limited with who you can bounce off because you are limited to the number of people that actually work in [type of schools]. So we get together and do a lot of things like that...

This research suggests that the difference between traditional types and PLC types of PD lies in the four areas described above: *relationship building*; *collaborative learning*; *sharing of knowledge*; and *networking among colleagues*. These may form the basis of benchmark indicators that could be used to assess the fit of a program to a PLC model. The benchmarks could be used to assess proposed PLC learning activities or they might be used as part of an evaluation, during and after a professional development program. These indicators are more process oriented than outcome oriented but in terms of an evaluation of the effectiveness of PD programs it is apparent from the findings presented here that these processes are important for the way many teachers learn. The results suggest that this may be more likely to be the case where PLCs are used as a basis for the professional development.

## **5 Conclusions**

This paper has presented findings from research conducted in two primary schools in the Darwin region about 12 teachers' perception of their professional development experiences. The study is therefore limited by the small number of schools and interviewees involved, especially in terms of generalisability. In one sense it collates a collection of experiences to determine what works and what does not work for these teachers. However, this research is important for an understanding of factors that contribute to the effectiveness of programs in an environment where professional learning communities are being considered as a way to 'build better schools'. It points to the readiness of teachers to adopt a PLC model of learning.

In terms of this readiness, it is apparent from the findings presented here that teachers in the two schools had a range of PD experiences which were dominated by traditional models, as opposed to PLC models. However, within these experiences many teachers identified aspects that, according to the literature reviewed, could be considered to be attributes of PLC models. They also identified

several attributes of more traditional models of PD, which they felt were effective. Because their experiences were dominated by traditional models of professional learning it could be argued that the majority of teachers have little idea what a PLC looks like. They therefore need to have PLCs modelled to them before they can fully conceive or take advantage of them. This is a major task for proponents of the 'building better schools' strategy.

The many examples of effective programs given, which fitted more traditional models of PD, point to their continuing suitability for many applications, particularly where the learning is directly related to classroom activities. These shorter, directly applicable programs were reported to be of great value to teachers, many of whom resented being taken unnecessarily out of their classrooms for programs that were not relevant to the school or their teaching. The role of the school's leadership in directing and supporting these 'practical, hands-on' activities was found to be important for teaching staff, especially for those who were newer, less experienced teachers.

Finally, this research contributes to an understanding of what differentiates more traditional types of PD from PLCs. The positive PD experiences of teachers interviewed for this research was compared to a list of characteristics found in the literature according to their fit with either a PLC or traditional model of professional learning. When these positive characteristics were analysed it was evident that the main points of difference between effective programs with higher proportions of PLC attributes and more traditional programs, lay in four areas: 1) Sharing of knowledge among staff within the school; 2) working together, collaborating in PD; 3) having an opportunity for relationship building; and 4) networking among colleagues within and outside the school. These four characteristics then may form the basis of a set of benchmarks or indicators that can be used to a) assess the likely fit of a proposed program according to a PLC model or b) evaluate the process aspects of learning that go on in a PLC learning environment.

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# **ADDING SOME GLUE TO THE POT: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL**

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## **Introduction**

This article explores the development of social capital within a group of students resulting from undertaking the Bachelor of Community Learning and Development at the University of Glasgow and how they in turn affect the development of social capital in the communities within which they work. The article contends that the participatory approach to education adopted by the programme builds social capital within the learning group and facilitates reflection and analysis of how social capital is both understood and experienced. In parallel to this process, community development tools are being learned and used in communities and an increased social capital in those communities is one of the outcomes of that work.

Drawing on Freirean and participative research methodology, discussed below, their understandings were explored within a framework developed by the World Bank (2002) to measure levels of social capital in communities. The results suggest that the impact of community development education is wider than the individual; influencing the development of social infrastructure and power relations within communities. It also highlights some of the potential conflicts that students experience and points to the need for additional support for students involved in this process.

### **Scottish Context**

Community Development in the Scottish context is supported by the Scottish Executive both by direct provision of services through local authorities and financial support of voluntary sector agencies. They (Scottish Executive 2003) identify the key features of Community Learning and Development to be empowerment, participation, inclusion, equal opportunity and anti-discrimination, self-determination and partnership. Whilst all of these are laudable, a recent emphasis on a centrally determined community planning process sets up inevitable conflicts between the key features highlighted above and the need of the state to control.

They further state that community learning and development contributes to strengthening social capital which they discuss as the improvement of knowledge, skills, confidence, motivation and the development of networks and resources that the individuals and groups in a community have. We can see that much of their definition reflects human capital rather than social capital and that they do not reflect a more comprehensive range of definitions, as discussed below. This leads to some relationships within social capital not being fully explored or developed; particularly bridging and linking. Finally there is no discussion in their literature of the dark side of social capital (Field 2003), which leaves workers and agencies unprepared to deal with the unintended consequences of their interventions.

## **Community Development Education**

The participants in this study were all students on the Bachelor of Community Learning and Development (BCLD). The BCLD was introduced by the University of Glasgow in the late 1990s as a way of enabling unqualified community workers to gain professional qualification whilst remaining in their paid work. The programme has particular features which attract mature students, many of whom have no formal qualifications and no post-school education. Firstly, there are no qualification requirements for entry on to the programme; applicants are interviewed in order to assess their suitability in terms of their academic ability and their experience of community work. Secondly, much of the content of the programme draws on their work experience which it interrogates in the light of theoretical perspectives. Thus students bring vital learning to the programme. This helps to ameliorate their lack of confidence in academic work which can act as a barrier to progress (James, K. 2003) even though they are skilled practitioners. Finally, the programme draws on many of the values of Freirean pedagogy such as being participatory, situated within the experience and language of the students and promoting critical personal and social reflection (McLaren, P., Leonard, P. 1993).

In 1997 this model was further developed to provide opportunities for community activists who were long term unemployed to access the programme (Beck 2000). This was achieved by establishing partnerships with community-based organisations that, by virtue of their position of trust within community networks, were able to recruit students who might not otherwise have seen themselves as able to engage in higher education due to a prevalent culture of non-education which often exists within working class communities (Miraglia, E 1996). In order to make the programme accessible to people with home and family responsibilities, those voluntary

organisations also secured funding for wages, childcare and education costs (Cloonan and Crossan 2002). Importantly, they were able to identify a wide range of work experience opportunities within the community which enabled the students to apply new learning in concrete situations. Local support groups were established and maintained by members of staff from the voluntary organisations which collectivised the learning experience and developed strong peer support groups; an example of bonding social capital as discussed by Putnam (2000).

It has been suggested that education adds to the levels of social capital in society. The World Bank (2002) indicates that social capital is produced through education in three fundamental ways: students practice social capital skills, such as participation and reciprocity; it provides forums for community activity and through civil education; students learn how to participate responsibly in their society.

This research indicates that students taking part in this programme not only developed their own social capital through the activities outlined above but also created social capital (Falk and Kilpatrick 2000) by developing and strengthening community infrastructure – systems of communication, trust and reciprocity between community groups with whom they worked.

In order to discuss the creation of social capital through this programme, some discussion of what the term means is required. Social capital is a contested term about which a great deal has been written but my discussion below concentrates on what I think are the key themes which impact on its relationship to both education and community development.

## **Social Capital**

Current discussions about forms of capital can be traced back to Marx's theories of Capitalism in general and capital in particular which he describes as, not only a sum of material products but rather the sum of commodities, of exchange values and of social magnitudes (Marx 1849) and Adam Smith's (1998) discussions of the social construction of value. Thus we can see that economic capital is understood within the context of particular historical and social relations. Throughout his writings, Marx highlights the inequality and essential antagonistic nature of the relationship between capital and labour. It follows that people with greater stocks of economic capital have greater power and therefore are able to exploit and oppress those who have less. Bourdieu later states that economic capital is at the root of all other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1997, p54). If what he says is true, we can therefore expect to see inequalities and exploitation taking place where other forms of capital are accrued. This is an analysis which is absent from discussions of social capital within Scottish social policy where a purely benign concept is posited.

Following on from this, the concept of human capital was developed in the 1960s to demonstrate the economic return to company, society and the individual on the investment of education and training inputs (Field, J. 2003). Human Capital is discussed by Becker (2002) as an individual's stock of knowledge, skills, health, values and habits. Becker's theory states that the greater a person's human capital the greater their ability to generate economic capital and so a causal link between forms of capital is suggested.

I will now consider four theorists of social capital, Bourdieu, Coleman, Putnam and Woolcock, suggesting that each has an important contribution to make to a rounded understanding of what

social capital is and how it functions in our society and more importantly how it can be used to affect social change.

Pierre Bourdieu sought to understand the mechanisms whereby forms of social inequality were maintained. Based on his work with Algerian tribes people, he developed the concept of cultural capital. He noted that people in that context used cultural symbols to indicate their place in the social order. He observed that some types of cultural taste enjoy more status than others. An example from contemporary British culture would be that listening to Opera and going to the theatre indicates to certain audiences a higher social position than playing darts and going to Bingo.

Within middle class families, there are cultural investment strategies which lead to their children optimizing their yield from the education system. These cultural investment strategies, reading particular books, trips to museums and art galleries etc. are in accord with the culture of schooling and therefore give the child an advantage in that setting thereby accruing greater stocks of human capital and therefore economic capital.

Bourdieu's definition of social capital is, "the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p119) He was interested in the social capital of the powerful and suggested that this functions to reproduce social inequality. An example he cites is that membership of a private golf club both signals a particular social position and develops a network of contacts which can facilitate business deals.

Bourdieu's idea of social capital links to the Gramscian concept of hegemony, political and moral leadership exercised by one group over another.

Dominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the 'spontaneous consent' of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups." (Strinati, 1995: 165)

James Coleman laid a great emphasis on the role of the family and church groups in developing social capital. Coleman defines social capital in terms of what it achieves, "social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible" (1988, p. 98). He theorised that social capital is the unintended outcome of individual action; individuals are driven by self interest - Rational Choice Theory which is based on the assumption that individuals maximize their self-interest - it is rational and self-serving to create social capital that you can draw upon in the future (Brown T. 2002).

Where Bourdieu conceptualised social capital as the endowment of the powerful, Coleman sees evidence of it at work within working class communities. His research analysed the results of children in Catholic schools and compared them to those in similar socio-economic situations. He found that the results were better within the Catholic schools and therefore factors other than economics must be in play. He noted that in the schools he studied, common values were held and

applied by families, teachers and priests; value of work, respect for authority etc. This meant that children were more predisposed to apply themselves in school, there were lower truancy and drop out rates and therefore they achieved better results. For those reasons, individuals were able to achieve more within that social network than they would have been able to do if that network did not exist. Coleman saw that as evidence of social capital.

Robert Putnam's book, *Bowling Alone* (2000), popularised the concept of social capital across many disciplines. His work is based on large surveys in USA including General Social Survey and National Election Records. From this evidence he theorises a causal link between high levels of social capital and good health and economic prosperity. For him, social capital refers to the features of social organizations such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions. Putnam identified two types of relationships within social capital - Bonding and Bridging. Bonding social capital refers to the strong bonds, which exist between homogenous groups such as church groups, some ethnic organisations and women's groups. Bridging social capital refers to the bonds between dissimilar groups. A community example of this could be community forums that bring together wide varieties of groups and agencies to collectivise community issues.

Michael Woolcock, social Scientist with the Development Research Group at the World Bank (2001) building on Putnam's work, develops the idea of a third form, Linking social capital. This he understands as a vertical form which links different levels of the social world enabling, for example, marginalized communities with high levels of bonding and bridging social capital to lever in resources from more powerful or affluent sections of society. It is the different

combinations of bonding, bridging and linking social capital that enable substantial change within communities (Woolcock 2001).

Within all of the discussions about social capital above there is a common theme: social capital makes a difference. Bourdieu suggests that it functions to keep the powerful in their positions of power, Coleman that it can enhance individuals' performance, Woolcock that Linking social capital enables marginalised communities to lever in resources and Putnam points to compelling empirical evidence that there is a correlation between high levels of social capital and many community benefits. If any or all of these are to be believed, educators whether community or institution based ought to have a clear understanding of how it works and how it can be developed or challenged.

Putnam (2000) suggests that social capital does not just produce warm feelings of trust but also rather clear and concrete outputs such as lower crime rates and greater longevity. It follows that, if this is the case, then there must be a way of determining social capital by measuring what it produces. The case study that follows draws on work done by the World Bank (Grootaert et al 2002) on the measurement of social capital. The Integrated Questionnaire for the Measurement of Social Capital examines in detail six broad themes: Groups and Networks; Trust and Solidarity; Collective Action and Cooperation; Information and Communication; Social Cohesion and Inclusion; Empowerment and Political Action. These themes provided the framework for a popular education based exploration with a group of students as described below.

## **Methodology**

This research takes a qualitative approach seeking to understand how this particular group who were both students of Community Development and workers supporting the development of social capital within marginalised communities account for, take action and otherwise manage their lives in relation to the subject of social capital (Miles & Huberman 1994) and was informed by popular educational approaches to research as described by Cornwall and Jewkes (1995).

Affirming that people's own knowledge is valuable, these approaches regard people as agents rather than objects: capable of analysing their own situations and designing their own solutions. A central thread which runs through these approaches is an emphasis on changing the role of the researcher from director to facilitator and catalyst. Through a process of mutual learning and analysis, which takes part throughout research rather than at distinct stages, people are brought into the research as owners of their own knowledge and empowered to take action (p. 1670).

This was important, since the relationship between the research group, including the researcher, had been established through participation in learning on the Bachelor of Community Learning and Development, based on Freirean (1972) approaches to education which seek to develop a democratisation of knowledge through critical reflection and dialogue. It would have been incongruous having sought to establish a learning environment based on co-investigation, to then adopt a research methodology which was typified by researcher as subject and respondents as objects. This approach is in accord with the definition of participatory research, described by the

Centre for Popular Education and Participatory Research at the University of California, Berkley as follows,

Participatory research blurs the traditional distinction between "researcher" and "subjects," as all are equally engaged in the pursuit of knowledge for a common purpose. It assumes that the purpose of research is not only to gain knowledge, but to use that knowledge to produce change that is consistent with a vision of a more equitable society. Participatory research can be seen, in its ideal manifestation, as a seamless integration of what are generally thought of separately as research and education. (CPEPR 2006)

Since social capital is conceptualised as a public good (Field 2003) in other words, collectively owned and therefore the methodology and the results of the research are generally expressed in terms of the consensus that the whole group arrived at in order to get a sense of what is collectively owned by the group. The results generally express the consensus view reached through the participative process described below, where there are exceptions to this they are highlighted.

The research explored the following two linked questions. Firstly, have there changes in levels of social capital within their lives as a result of taking part in the course? And secondly, what impact on the development of social capital are they having in the communities they live and work in?

The research group was made up of twenty-seven students on the Bachelor of Community Learning and Development course and their lecturer who agreed to meet for a research day to explore the theme of social capital which was seen to be a critical issue both in their thinking and

practice as community development workers. All of the group were mature students who were working in a community development role as well as studying. According to the UK's national Occupational Standards for Community Work (PAULO 2005), the main intentions of community work are to:

- Develop working relationships with communities and organisations
- Encourage people to work with and learn from each other
- Work with people in communities to plan for change and take collective action
- Work with people in communities to develop and use frameworks for evaluation
- Develop community organisations
- Reflect on and develop own practice and role

From this it can be seen that the development of social capital is at least implied in the practice of Community Development given the emphasis on developing networks and organisations and enabling marginalised communities to bridge with power holders. In addition to this, as part of the course they had previously explored notions of social capital and had developed an approach to learning based on dialogue using small group techniques. Given that they were familiar and comfortable with this way of working, the format of the day built on that experience.

### **The research process**

The process consisted of one full day of small groupwork and whole group dialogues and a follow up half day review session. Initially I gave an input to the group of students on the World Bank's Integrated Questionnaire for the Measurement of social capital (Grootaert et al 2002) and the six

themes which arose from it, which we then discussed. These themes are Groups and Networks, Trust and Solidarity, Collective Action and Cooperation, Information and Communication, Social Cohesion and Inclusion and Empowerment and Political Action. We then broke into six small groups and each group discussed one of the themes listed above and recorded the collective response of the group on flipcharts.

For each of the six themes, a group of four or five of the students discussed what they understood and how they experienced that theme in their personal and professional lives. In particular they reflected on the impact of undergoing community development education on the development of their own social capital and their ability to develop that of others. They recorded their collective view on flipcharts and their observations on the theme were presented back to the full group of twenty seven, who asked questions and added to or adjusted the group's work. In this way a whole group consensus was arrived at. This process was repeated for each theme. All of the responses were typed up and circulated to all participants. At a follow up half day session the results were again discussed by the full group and final changes were made.

Throughout the process, individuals were given the opportunity to exemplify the emerging themes from their work practice. They were also encouraged to say when their views or experience were not in harmony with the prevailing view. These are recorded where appropriate in the results below.

## **Results**

### **Groups and networks**

The research group reported the development of a wide range of organisations and networks being established as a direct result of participation in the course. The first category of these is the formal and informal groups of students and community groups, which centre round personal and professional support. This indicates the development of bonding social capital (Putnam 2000) based on a commonly held set of values, practices and language. The second category is the formal groups and networks within the community that students have begun to be involved in; these include community forums, advisory groups and other community wide networks and projects. Some bridging social capital is also being demonstrated here, given that a range of potentially diverse groups could be involved in these various arenas.

A range of benefits was identified which flow from being part of these groups covering the following five issues. Firstly, access to information about what is happening both in the community and in the wider social policy context. Secondly, they provide the opportunity for engagement in a wider range of thematic and geographical networks. Interpersonal support, encouragement and challenge were also made available. Access to additional resources and opportunities such as training was highlighted. Finally, they provided an opportunity to apply theoretical insights and critical analysis.

The group reported that their input into these groups took the form of a range of interpersonal supports to fellow workers. They also shared knowledge and experience about community issues

and assisted people to work in reflective ways and bring about empowerment in community groups.

### **Trust and solidarity**

Involvement in the course had had an impact on the way the students worked in the community and that that in turn had affected the levels of trust within the community both towards the process of community work and about the local authority.

The course had enabled them to examine and become clearer about community development values. These are described in the UK as a commitment to social justice, self-determination, working and learning together, sustainable communities, participation and reflective practice (PAULO 2003) This gave them a basis for developing their own practice with confidence, and caused them to both recognise and challenge poor practice. They had developed the confidence to ask questions and challenge issues of discrimination since they had developed a level of critical consciousness which exposes the structures of power and how they impact on the lives of people (Ledwith 2005). This allowed them to recognise hidden agendas and power games, and to be more strategic in what they did to bring about positive change.

A parallel development was that they often experienced higher levels of conflict as they challenged the status quo. This phenomenon is seen by Riger (1993), as an inevitable result of a change in power in the individual in a context of traditional hierarchies. In some cases, this was so great that they could no longer work with some organisations because they did not feel that their values were now in accord.

The group reported that levels of trust in the community work process had risen and that increased levels of participation in community groups and action evidenced this. This link between levels of generalised trust and community participation is well documented by Warren (1999). The group thought that the reasons for this increase in trust were threefold. Firstly, they were adopting models of practice that were transparent and reliable. Secondly, they were able to enter into an informal education process, which explained community development values and principles in accessible language. Finally, as they worked with other organisations with similar values, more collaborative ways of working were developed. The increased impact of these collaborations increased trust and confidence within the community.

Some people thought that there had been an increase in the levels of trust that the community had towards the local authority – this was expressed by about half of the group. The students felt that this was due to them explaining in accessible language the way decisions were made and identify cooperative individuals within various agencies. This resulted in the community being better able to engage effectively with the local authority, better decisions were made and some services were delivered more appropriately. All of this increased levels of trust and confidence.

Some group members were less optimistic about the impact they had had on trust of the local authority. These tended to be people who came from areas where the local authority were less open to a community development approach to their own work and less reliable in following up on their promises to the community. An example of this was where one local authority funded a community worker to support a group of young people. He worked with them to campaign to have use of a

local school as a base for community activities. When this worker moved on, the new worker stated that he could not support their position because it was against the policy of his department. This led to disillusionment rather than to increased levels of trust.

A positive example was a local arts group who implemented an arts strategy produced by the social Inclusion Partnership. The local authority funded this group; they also had a local authority worker seconded to them. They were able to assert influence and control over the development and implementation of the strategy and provided a vehicle for the voice of local people to be heard. The result of this was a series of local arts events, which were well supported and appreciated by the community; people felt more positively towards their community and the services that were available to them from the local authority.

Finally, the group consensus was that they were more likely to become involved in collaborative projects since undertaking the course. This indicates that their levels of both trust and approaches that embodied reciprocity had increased; again demonstrating increased levels of social capital, by Putnam's definition.

### **Collective action and cooperation**

Some members of the group stated that they were now involved in a range of collaborative projects; the entire group at local level, 8 at national level and 3 international level. It should be noted that not all students were involved directly at all levels, however due to their high levels of bonding social capital they were able to both influence and benefit from other group members' connections.

At the local level some were involved in projects which dealt with women's issues, community safety and social inclusion. They were also part of informal networks and more formal structure such as community forum networks. At a national level, they were involved in action dealing with child protection, poverty, issues around asylum seekers and refugees and the national umbrella organisation for the voluntary sector. At an international level, they were involved in anti-poverty campaigns and popular education networks.

Involvement in these partnerships had tangible benefits to the community as well as developing the students' skills and knowledge. These took the form of new services that were developed, in some cases they were able to transcend boundaries established by health boards, social inclusions, partnerships etc, in order to be able to offer these services more widely. For example, a health project delivered a community training programme funded by the Social Inclusion Partnership and the health board. This meant that people who would benefit from the programme but who lived outside the SIP boundary were able to be included. Similarly, joint funding bids and better co-ordination of resources enabled increased funding of some community activities. Finally, new training opportunities were developed through these collaborative projects.

The group identified that these collaborations were enriched by their contributions; in particular their grass-roots knowledge of the community and its issues enabled them to encourage better participation from local people in these collaborations. They recognised that they were able to influence some of these partnerships by demonstrating different approaches to community work, which in turn developed practices and services which were more attuned to community need.

### **Information and communication**

Everyone in the group reported that there had been a variety of communications systems which they had helped to set up as a result of going through the course. Examples of these included newsletters, informal phone chains, email message boards, websites, leaflets and databases. One worker had developed a virtual classroom on the Internet so rural participants could get access to learning resources.

However, the greatest impact on communication they observed was the way they now communicated with individuals and organisations in their practice. In particular, they reported that they had become more reflective, critical and challenging in their communication. This was in part a result of recognising their role as agents of change in the community. They also made a point of developing safe spaces for dialogue so that, rather than them taking a didactic role, they would enable community participants to explore issues and come up with their own solutions. Finally, many of them had begun to hold events in venues where local people were used to going and felt comfortable, rather than expecting them to come to open days or their offices. Overall they reported that the flow of information and communication in the community had improved through people undertaking the course.

### **Social Cohesion and Inclusion**

The group reported concrete examples of how their having undertaken the course and the impact that had on their understanding and practice had affected social inclusion in the community.

Through their informal education work with marginalized groups, people began to have a greater awareness of their rights as citizens and therefore began to have higher expectations of what it meant to be included within society. This gave rise to excluded groups and individuals beginning to challenge agencies and service providers to be more accountable to the people they served and to change unequal oppressive practices. There was some evidence of increased uptake in educational opportunities. They particularly highlighted the uptake of Higher Education which they felt was a direct result of them acting as role models for their peers, many of whom would not otherwise have seen this as a viable option for them. Local projects had developed both in terms of their practice and participation by local people due to the support they offered. Because service providers had been made aware of the issues and needs of local people they began to deliver services that were more appropriate.

In their role as informal educators with agencies and service providers, they challenged and changed the use of excluding language and processes. Also, they have been able to highlight the role of local people in the decision-making process. In particular, they reported that through their interventions more women were now involved at a decision-making level within community organisations, which are often the preserve of men (Dominelli 2006). This was also made possible by the fact that the groups they worked with had increased their levels of skill, knowledge and confidence; they were therefore now more able to engage productively with agencies.

There are still many issues of community participation that have yet to be addressed successfully by them as community development practitioners. These include complex organisational structures and bureaucratic procedures, which exclude people's participation. Vested interests of some

powerful group still act as a barrier to inclusion of marginalized people. Finally, the short-term nature of funding is seen as a limiting factor in the effectiveness of projects that are designed to tackle social exclusion, since the issues are inevitably long-term in nature.

### **Empowerment and Political Action**

In terms of their own personal empowerment, the group reported that they had developed a political literacy. By this, they meant that they were now able to be aware of hidden agendas, understand the mechanisms of participation and confidently analyse complex social situations and take appropriate action. In this, they felt they were less reliant on expert solutions and therefore more able to challenge poor practice, in particular practice that was tokenistic or discriminatory in its nature.

They reported that they had become less afraid of conflict but that they were more selective about the issues they would take on; now they relied on their critical analysis of the situation and their ability to affect change.

Because of their own personal empowerment, they have been able to affect the empowerment of others in the community. Examples of this were:

- One of the students was working with a group of local women exploring issues of power. Once they were clear about what the issues were and they had developed their confidence, they decided to join the management committee of a local housing group in order to have an influence on their environment.

- A student brought together a group of local people to reflect on their community and develop a vision for change. Having collectivised their understanding and aspirations for the future, they were able to influence the local community planning committee to include their ideas.
- A youth worker in the group worked with a group of young men to explore employment issues. They were then able to identify what they wanted to do and where they might get additional support.
- A Disability group took up place on management group of the centre they met in
- An Out of school care project became training provider and employed local people
- One person supported family member to be active in youth forum

However, the students also identified an issue that, at least in the short-term, could be seen as negative. About a quarter of the students who had been active in their community their involvement either due to finding employment or because they “saw through bogus participative models”. By this they meant that what they had originally thought to be genuinely participative models had, after a deeper analysis turned out to be tokenistic (Arnstein 1969) and therefore the overall level of community participation in some groups has gone down.

In conclusion, they identified that when groups of people living and working in the same community go through the programme together the impact is multiplied. This is partly because they draw collective strength and support from group members and provide a much more visible role model in the community. The success of this approach has had an impact on many local

authorities in Scotland who are now seeing the value of this type of training in the broader process of community regeneration.

### **Analysis and Conclusions**

The data and ensuing analysis shows that the development of new networks of relationships, new norms and values and the development of reciprocal working arrangements between the students and other colleagues represents an increase in their Bonding social capital. This provides a space of resistance (Barr 1999) where they are able to support one another personally and develop their thinking and practice. This experience has also been transferred to the groups they work with in the community. Through being able to model and embed reflective and participatory practice within community groups, they have helped to increase their trust and confidence collectively. This illustrates my earlier point that social capital is both drawn on and built in the process you report on here, as supported by Falk and Kilpatrick (2000).

From that position of security and strength, the students seem more able to make meaningful links with a range of community groups and agencies. This is in part due to the change in their communication processes, which are now more participative and more problem posing than didactic. This represents the development of Bridging social capital. The community has also seen an increase in this form of social capital as evidenced by the increase in partnership activities, community forums and issue based networks. This collectivising of community issues has also had an impact on the third form of social capital - Linking social capital. Because of an increase in collective political power and political literacy, both student and community groups have been able to link with more influential and powerful sections of society to secure resources for the

community. The case cited earlier of the grassroots arts organisation which has drawn in several thousands of pounds of local authority money and staff time to develop locally determined arts events and projects ably exemplifies this aspect of social capital in practice. The students attribute these changes to having gone through the learning experience on the BCLD.

However, the danger of community development as proposed by the Scottish Executive is that it concentrates too much on the development of bonding social capital – the creation of small groups of people from similar backgrounds who support one another and the development of Human capital – particularly vocational skills and literacy. However, if no Bridging social capital is developed between groups, the scope for political change remains remote; poverty is managed rather than challenged. Once those bridges have been established across a wide range of groups with different backgrounds and interests, the political muscle that is developed can make demands on the authorities for appropriate services and resources.

This process of building networks of strongly bonded and linked groups could be understood as steps in a process of counter hegemony (Simian 1982). New alliances of groups based on different values and approaches could form, in embryo at least, the war of position that Gramsci talks of (Gramsci 1971). With the advent of Internet and other communications technology, the scope for global Bridging is more real than ever before thereby offering up the possibility, as yet unrealised, of the creation of a counter-hegemonic bloc.

It seems that social capital could be a useful way of understanding the contribution of Community Development practice to the work of community regeneration. This would only be the case however if the definition of what social capital is embraces the three forms discussed above and also takes into consideration Bourdieu's (1985) understanding of forms of Cultural and social capital as a reproducer of privilege and social inequality. The role of the Community Worker then

becomes one not just of organiser but also one who develops critical and reflective practices within the work.

One of the implications for Higher Education in this context, which was raised by the students, is the impact that this educative process has on their whole lives, not just their thinking. Development of new forms of social capital inevitably challenges existing norms and relationships. This is of particular concern in two aspects. Firstly, the tension that develops between the students and their employers; the development of new values and approaches to Community Development, which are more participative, and challenging with a focus on change develop controversy automatically develop friction with current power holders. Secondly, new friends, new ways of thinking and different language act as a huge threat to established patterns and norms within family and friends.

We in Higher Education do little to ameliorate these professional and relational pressures on students, yet in some cases it is these issues rather than lack of academic ability or commitment that will be the difference between the student being successful or not. Further study into the extent to which these pressures act on students must be undertaken. This would in turn suggest the best models of delivery and support systems that should be put in place to ensure that students, particularly non-traditional students, have the best possible chance of navigating their way through the Higher Education experience and develop new forms of social capital without coming unstuck. However, this brief study indicates that approaches which encourages people to collectivise their learning and work practice – to establish communities of practice (Wenger, E. C., and Snyder, W. M. 2000) are likely to be successful

In conclusion, this research and others (Field 2003) highlight that the development of social capital is a complex and problematic process. Some Community Development practice, which strengthens local organisations, can unwittingly marginalize the most disadvantaged sections of the community

and promote competition rather than cooperation. What this research reveals is that good community development practice must develop bonding, linking and bridging relationships of social capital if it is to contribute to genuine and sustainable social change. The complex web of inputs and outcomes, in terms of the creation of social capital needs to be analysed in depth if this is to be avoided.

Similarly, the suspicion amongst some workers that there is a link between the development of social capital, New Labour's Communitarian agenda and the erosion of the welfare state needs to be taken seriously in terms of policy, funding and practice. Finally, it has been clearly stated that the role of the local authority is key if community development workers are to help to develop social capital. Unless there is congruence in terms of values and processes, social capital will be harmed rather than created. And yet, I agree with Wallis and Dollery (2002) that, "significant scope would seem to exist for them to open up their political opportunity structure and establish relations of trust with previously excluded groups and organizations in order to positively contribute to the formation of social capital within their communities".

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**POLICY CHANGE IN TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
CHALLENGES THE TEACHER LEARNER COMMUNITY AS A GENUINE  
PLACE FOR TEACHER LEARNING**

**Robyn Hewitson**

**Introduction**

For a full school year, the author worked in the dual roles of critical ethnographic researcher and Assistant Principal at Gulfview High School, a large metropolitan high school in South Australia with around 900 students that collected its student population generally from the surrounding low to very low socio-economic areas. This school was a newly labelled '*self managing*' school (Caldwell and Spinks 1988, 1992). The full study examined teacher professional development as it played out in a devolved school setting which included the use of student free days; the development of curriculum development teams; the involvement in state and federally funded teacher professional development projects and the implementation of a new state teacher development policy. This paper focuses specifically on the effects of a new teacher professional development policy on teachers' views about their learning and improvement as both individuals and as part of a larger '*teacher community*' (Grossman, Wineburg et al., 2001, p.943).

Despite some well acknowledged '*structural, cultural, and vocational impediments*' (Grossman, Wineburg et al., 2001, p.947) to the development and maintenance of teacher communities within

any school at an official level (carrying out community activities within school time), it is possible for teachers to gravitate towards each other thereby creating informal teacher groups.

## **Background**

### **Self-management takes hold in Australia**

Throughout the 1990's, the Australian government vigorously encouraged a competitive tone within education, and as Ball and Goodson (1985, p.5) declared '*schools were to be subject to market forces.*' Levacic considered that '*the separation of purchaser from provider and an element of user choice between providers*' constituted the '*distinguishing characteristics of a quasi-market*' (Levacic, 1995, p.167).

Under the banner of '*new public management*' (Rhodes, 1994, p.144), schools were expected to compete in the same market places as the individual consumer. Relying on the work of Caldwell and Spinks (1988), the importance of moving schooling into self-management, focussed primarily on the development of skills and methods for managing global budgets, despite the rhetoric that suggested that the real purpose was directed towards improved student outcomes and the emergence of quality education. Caldwell (1990, p.20) was keen that his suggested '*patterns of management*' be interpreted '*unmistakably in terms of their contribution to...quality schooling, rather than ...as a means ensuring greater efficiency in the utilization of resources conceived narrowly in financial terms.*' Both federal and state governments and bureaucracies were in vulnerable positions searching for ways that they could reduce budget costs for the delivery of public education. The statements about '*school-based decision-making*' practices made by Caldwell (1990, p.3) at that time were both convincing and attractive, as well as potentially

empowering for the individual school. These practices provided the perfect way to shift an economic problem away from government and down to individual schools.

The context-free aspect of self management was an extremely persuasive selling point which promoted '*self management*' as applicable to all schools. The school management policy documentation emerging at the time of this study in South Australia clearly reflected the consumption and significance of economic rationalism doctrine, and in particular the '*self management*' approach. **Partnerships 21** was '*South Australia's unique model of local management*' (Department of Education Training and Employment, 1999, p.2). The material introduced teachers to new terms like '*community and partnerships and governance; quality improvement and accountability; human resource management; the global budget and financial and asset management*' (Department of Education Training and Employment, 1999)

Within the '*Partnerships 21*' literature there were no insights provided as to the role that teachers would play in the self management process, despite the promises of improved student outcomes. As Ball (1994, p.66) summarises:

*Together the market and the management reforms replace collective, bureaucratic controls, structures and relationships with individualistic and competitive ones.*

### **New initiative for teacher professional development - a shift in responsibility**

On 23 September 1998, the Minister for Education, Children's Services and Training in South Australia announced a major initiative to purportedly promote training and professional development for all South Australian government school and preschool teachers. The initiative

stated that from 1999, all children would not attend preschools and schools in the final week of the last term of the school year, thereby shortening the school year from forty-one weeks to forty weeks. Teachers who met a set of eligibility criteria would be required to undertake five days of training and professional development either outside of normal working hours or during the final week of the fourth school term. Up to the equivalent of one week of accrued time participating in approved training and professional development activities outside of normal working hours, during school holidays or while on leave (other than sick leave) could be cashed-in as authorised absence from duty in the final week of school.

The '*Shortened School Year*' policy (Department of Education Training and Employment, 1999) as it was initially known was released at a time in South Australian educational reform to affect significant change to training and professional development of teachers.

1. Teacher professional development focused more on skills training and the development of perceived deficit skills, decreasingly drawing on the word 'professional' to define the process.
2. Teacher development shifted from a central responsibility of the employing authority, to one that was increasingly a school responsibility passed on to the school Principal and then on to the individual teacher.
3. The focus of teacher development for teachers changed from learning and improvement to the completion of specified hours.

These changes were implied within the initiative's rationale:

*This initiative recognises and values the considerable training and professional development done by staff in their own time and aims to significantly lift the level of their skills, understanding and practice with less disruption to student learning programs. (Department of Education Training and Employment, 1999, p.1)*

Just like the context-free self management doctrine detailed by Caldwell and Spinks, this new policy for teacher professional development also adopted a context-free approach that advertised flexibility and adaptability in its rationale while putting in place ‘*a set of regulatory devices that operate[d] by requiring teacher compliance with standardised administrative and accounting procedures*’ (Seddon, 1999, p.19). The shift in purpose of professional development brought on by the grip of the market ideology, although shrouded in reform rhetoric of choice, participation, student success, and skills improvement supported a notion of learning as ‘*a process in which a producer provides knowledge to a consumer*’ (Wenger, 2004, p.28). According to the change in policy, teacher improvement would be achieved through transferences of information, rather than shared knowledge construction. If a teacher lacked a skill, then the transference of information about that skill from an expert, and practice of that skill by the teacher would result in skill improvement. As Smyth (1993, p.3) says:

*Teacher development against this kind of backdrop, far from being a process of enlivening teachers and turning schools into critical and inquiring communities, becomes a process of ensuring cost cutting and of putting in place procedures to ensure compliance, docility an the creation of schools as institutions whose main concern is meeting the requirements of centrally devised diktats.*

The '*Shortened School Year*' policy guidelines about teacher professional development (Department of Education Training and Employment, 1999) were more than a collection of guiding principles. They encompassed a political vision about teachers. The vision disposed of teachers as critical practitioners or intellectuals. Rather, it constructed a new version of a '*competent teacher*' as '*one who is able to implement the policies of the government of the day effectively*' (Smyth, 1995, p.6). The rationale implied that learning, segregated from the work context, normal work time and the supportive, collegial framework, had the potential to improve teacher skills, understanding and practice, with the bonus of somehow being less disruptive to students and their learning. The danger was, as Watkins (1993, p.137) declared:

*...the sense of solidarity held by teachers is gradually broken down by an enforced competitive individualism as not only schools but also teachers are forced to compete with each other in the so-called 'marketplace'.*

Under this policy, teachers were increasingly viewed as consumers and expected to accept and participate in the extensive menu of professional development fads on offer or lose their prize of a week away from school at the end of the school year. The policy appeared to be '*teacher blind*', failing '*adequately to take account of the realities of teachers' work*' (Smyth, 1995, p.71).

### **Understanding policy**

Policy can be thought about as both a text as well as a process (Taylor, Rizvi et al., 1997), and for the purpose of this study, the policy under discussion was interpreted by teachers mostly as a text that required adherence, and its *'political character'* (Taylor, Rizvi et al., 1997, p.25) initially appeared invisible to those it impacted on most. If policy, in its simplest definition is *'whatever governments choose to do, or not to do'* (Dye, 1992, p.2), it is important to acknowledge that relevant government departments become responsible for developing further texts in the form of directives, guidelines or more policy to make clear the intentions of the original government policy. The new teacher development policy which is the focus of this paper, and which will be discussed in detail further along, reflected movement away from acknowledging teachers' learning as both an ongoing process and context driven, and instead supported the adoption of a culture of individualism reliant on prescriptive *'rituals of verification'* (Power, 1997). The policies, practices, strategies, ideologies and structures that were guiding the evolving *'managerial school'* (Gewirtz, 2002), were also affecting the meaning and purpose of teacher professional development.

While this change in policy carried *'a degree of superficial appeal'* (Smyth, 1995, p.2) because teachers would supposedly become *'demonstrably more accountable, efficient and effective'*, there was likely to be a significant impact on the way in which teachers addressed their learning requirements, willingly or unwillingly. With the new emphasis on an individual teacher's learning rather than an encouragement to participate in a supported *'community of teacher learners'* (Grossman, Wineburg et al., 2001, p.943), changes to teacher practices, teacher beliefs and teacher engagement with each other were expected.

The new policy placed no official value on this kind of learning, particularly teacher interactions (related to professional development) that took place during school hours, because the time involved in any activities could not be validated for inclusion in a teacher's *'required hours'*. Hargreaves (1995, p.26) heeds a warning about approaches to teacher professional development that fail to acknowledge its complexity, particularly its emotional and moral dimensions. He says:

Focusing on technical competence in isolation can make teacher development into a narrow, utilitarian exercise that does not question the purposes and parameters of what teachers do. All the glitziness of stage-managed workshop presentations, all the "bells and whistles" in the world, are no substitute for the openness and rigor of this moral and political questioning. Such workshops may even seduce teachers into sidestepping such questioning. Even when new techniques have demonstrable merit, training in them may be ineffective when it does not address the real conditions of teachers' work, the multiple and contradictory demands to which teachers must respond, the cultures of teachers' workplaces, and teachers' emotional relationships to their teaching, to their children, and to change in general.

## **Methodology**

It was possible and even expected that any change in the policy procedures and/ or practices of enacting teacher professional development at a school site had the potential to alter the way teachers viewed their roles, their responsibilities, their relationships with their leaders and colleagues, and their identity as both workers and professionals.

The author's intention was to capture and examine a large number of teachers' stories, their experiences and responses to the new teacher development policy utilising critical ethnographic practices. Although there were acknowledged '*tensions in ...[the] marriage of critical social theory and ethnographic methods*' (Anderson, 1989, p.263), I was confident that other researchers (Foley, 2002, ; Sleeter, 1998) had contributed to smoothing out the tensions, and this was to my advantage as a researcher in 2003. As Thomas (1993, p.33) says:

*Like making a stew, doing critical ethnography is more than just the sum of its individual tasks. Not every component will be critical, nor will all critical parts be equal in value for explanation.*

In fact, my attention was specifically drawn to the work of Foley (2002, p.469), who himself was experimenting with ways in which ethnography could become '*a more accessible, engaging, public genre*' (Foley, 2002, p.469), and who was adopting a more political version of critical ethnography. There was no standard set of guidelines or agreed assumptions on which all critical ethnographers agreed, however Foley suggested that perhaps the thread of agreement resided in a commitment to undertake '*intensive empirical investigations of everyday, lived cultural reality*' (2002, p.472). What became attractive to me in Foley's (2002, p.487) work, was his quest to reshape a critical ethnographer to be someone:

*...who is trying to use common sense, autobiographical experience, everyday language, irony, satire, metaphor, and parody to understand everyday life...this eclectic approach helps produce realist narratives that are much more accessible and reflexive...*

### **'Insider' ethnographic research**

In the research site, I became what Foley et al (2001, p.37) might term a '*species of border crosser*'. This meant a researcher working within the field of ethnography while at the same time working as a critical '*insider*'. He defined such a person as someone who:

*...construct[s] insider ethnographic knowledge using conceptual tools from the academy...present[ing] this knowledge in a way that renders their subjects' actions and beliefs comprehensible and sympathetic to outsiders and insiders alike. (Foley, Levinson et al., 2001)*

Of all of the roles available to me as a researcher, I chose perhaps the most difficult. Adler and Adler (1987, p.67) have described this role using the term '*complete membership*':

*Rather than experiencing mere participatory involvement, complete-member-researchers (CMRs) immerse themselves fully in the group as "natives". They and their subjects relate to each other as status equals, dedicated to sharing in a common set of experiences, feelings, and goals. As a result, CMRs come closest of all researchers to approximating the emotional stance of the people they study ... In conducting their research, then, CMRs often adopt the overt role.*

### **Engaging the teachers**

In deciding how best to engage teachers in discussions about the effects of the new policy initiative on their teaching, I returned to Roger Simon's (1992, p.60) work on *'pedagogy of possibility'*. My goal was to create the circumstances in which it would be natural for teachers to engage in *'a consideration of why things are the way they are, how they got to be that way, in what ways might change be desirable; and what it would take for things to be otherwise'*, (Simon, 1992, p.60). Teachers might then become partners in a counterhegemonic discourse that could *'challenge its participants with processes of reorientation, redefinition and revisioning'* (Simon, 1992, p.62). This was dependent on the creation of teacher *'communities of solidarity'* (Simon, 1992, p.62). It was crucial that teachers felt a *'communicative openness'*, *'recognition of partiality'* and a *'sense of collective venture'* in their individual and group discussions with me.

The teaching staff, made up of eighty five teachers volunteered to offer their insights to the study of the effects of the new teacher development policy as the year progressed, however, in order to engage in consistent dialogue with teachers about their experiences and responses, I divided those teachers who desired a greater involvement into four groups based on length of service. Some preferred to be interviewed as part of their group while others preferred an individual interview. Only after the first round of interviews did it become clear that the majority of teachers from the group, who had served the least amount of time in their careers, also shared a common work space on the second floor of the main school building. The combination of individual contributions as well as the cumulative analysis of the contributions provided me with a rich and detailed understanding of the growing tensions between the more formal departmental demands regarding

teacher development and the informal learning needs that were addressed within the common work space.

## **Discussion**

### **The work environment**

The interviews with teachers occurred after school and teachers promptly arrived at the discussion area keen to share their experiences and reflections. From these interviews, teachers openly and enthusiastically described the ways in which they attempted to accommodate the multitude of administrative demands on their available time. Teachers were required to attend staff meetings, student free days and team meetings. In the group interviews, teachers made it clear that working under the pressure of the three 105 minute extended lessons each day decreased student behaviour predictability in their classes, and intensified the anxiety for them in facing another day. During a working week, each teacher could only expect to receive one lesson (105 minutes) as non-instructional time, and that led to two things. Firstly, if a teacher had a sick day, most teachers did not pick the day with the free lesson, and secondly, many of the teachers whom I interviewed were critical of the leadership/management decision to shape the school timetable in this way. The majority of teachers recognised that the timetable was a significant school structure which had become a major debilitating obstacle in a long line that teachers had to deal with. The established processes involved in timetabling were significantly affected and many teachers added, negatively, by the added vocational course offerings, which necessitated the extension of the individual lesson length.

### **The ‘required hours’ experiences**

Within this work environment, the newer teachers expressed a more willing acceptance of the new arrangements for teacher development compared with the older serving teachers. Alison, a teacher of two years experience for example, although quite accepting of the notion of carrying out professional development activities within her own time, was concerned about the positivist approach that the policy adopted. She interpreted the policy as saying:

*...prove to me that you’ve done what you say you’ve done. Give me a certificate of attendance. If I can’t see it, then it didn’t happen.*

Within the time between the first discussion with the group and the second group meeting, Alison had been promoted to one of the Middle School Managers and she was feeling quite overwhelmed with the new information that she needed to know. She described how she would sit up at night and wade through the piles of notes and forms related to her new role wondering why this was not regarded as ‘*professional development*’. She said:

*I regard this as professional development and yet I can’t get on my computer and type myself out a certificate of attendance.*

Within the new teacher development policy, teachers were permitted to accrue ‘*professional reading time*’ as a means of meeting the required amount of time, however many of the new teachers expressed discomfort at doing this. Alison described acknowledging reading time in her summary sheet as ‘*really dodgy*’. This group of teachers believed that it implied that they were less than diligent because they were not out in the marketplace grabbing the newest packaged session

on behaviour management or assessment procedures. They admitted to increasingly doubting the value of the learning which was carried out in partnership with their colleagues. The '*required hours*' guidelines demanded verification and if they relied on qualitative methods to assess their learning such as critical reflective practice, rather than an attendance certificate, they might be denied their week off, failing to not only complete the specified hours, but also meet the requirements of acceptable types of activities.

### **Defining 'normal'**

One of the paradoxical aspects of the policy was the criteria for approval. The policy guidelines stated:

*One of the main aims of this initiative is to improve the skills, understanding and practice of the individual for his or her current and future work with the department. Approved activities are therefore learning activities (or reasonable time spent in developing those activities for others). Activities that are a normal part of a staff member's responsibilities - eg participation in staff meetings - would not be approved.*

*(Department of Education Training and Employment, 1999)*

Was teaching and learning not to be regarded as a normal part of a teacher's responsibilities? For many of the teachers who believed that participation in a '*community of teacher learners*' was part of their 'normal' job, a disturbing paradox emerged from the guidelines. Firstly the guidelines emphasised an individualistic approach which seemed to devalue and make invisible the need for team and whole school enterprises for significant growth, improvement and personal learning to occur. Rather than the guidelines being constructed as a genuine attempt to reshape and improve

teacher professional development, many teachers in each of the interview groups believed it was designed to reduce costs related to providing meaningful teacher professional development. Rather than focussing on relevant discussions, debates and ongoing school-based projects related to teachers' learning, both administrators and teachers became bogged down with untangling the confusion about what a '*learning activity*' was and what it was not. Inevitably, there was diverse opinion about what was a normal school responsibility.

### **Principals decide**

Teachers talked with colleagues beyond their own school, and reported in the interviews that principals' interpretations of those issues varied, and hence the treatment of teachers varied, making it appear unfair for some teachers to have a principal who was stricter on interpreting the guidelines. According to the interviewees, some Principals were very permissive, arguing that it did not matter what teachers did in their required hours as long as they were doing something. Others took the view that it was a serious matter and required diligent inspection of any activities carried out. Principals were forced to consider the consequences of teachers who failed to accept the guidelines. What would the penalty be for resistant teachers? Would teachers who failed to complete the required hours be forced to remain at school in the last week of the school year and complete their own professional development? Who would supervise these teachers and what would they do? What value would activities undertaken under these conditions have for the teachers involved? It became clear in the interviews as well as in informal conversations and other meetings that teachers were motivated to complete the required hours to accrue their week off at the end of the year. Teachers clearly understood that:

*The eligibility to be paid while absent from duty in the final week of term four is dependent on teachers undertaking professional development work which is additional to such normal duties. (Department of Education Training and Employment, 1999)*

### **The impact of the 37 and a half hours**

The impact was immense for many of the interviewed teachers and a strong sense of not being ‘*professional*’ pervaded the conversations. If it was not an activity, and there was no one there to verify it, then it wasn’t learning, they said. Corinne, an older teacher who joined teaching after a career in business said:

*If you don’t have the proof; you don’t have somebody sitting at the end of the bed at night with a stopwatch who says, ‘you can turn the light off now and go to sleep. You’ve done your two and half hours of professional reading.*

The young teachers did not express the cynicism that other older and more experienced teachers displayed in their interviews. They were not laughing at the clumsiness of the policy as the longer serving teachers did, but believed that any decision or action regarding their teacher professional development was interpreted by the school administration as a reflection of their attitude to their job. The younger serving teachers resolved the professional development imperative, by maintaining a commitment to school-based, team-oriented development programs that might be described as both informal and unpredictable, in comparison with the new policy guidelines, however, they also completed the required hours providing the requisite attendance or completion certificates.

Over time, within the interviews the debate between teachers about what was and was not a learning activity waned. Only the activities that produced an attendance certificate were used in the required hours' documentation, while in regard to the other more interactive, team-based activities, teachers stopped writing down that they were involved. Ashley said:

*I can't prove that I did it, and I certainly can't recite what I read last night. I just won't acknowledge that I read it.*

As the interviews continued throughout second term, an important point of clarification was made by Alison, which the other interviewees agreed with:

*I don't think we doubt that we're learning [from the other kinds of interactions that we have]. We think the powers higher up will doubt that we're learning if we put down 'professional reading' or 'professional conversations.'*

Not all of the eighty five teachers at Gulfview High School easily resolved the dilemma between the new policy and their own beliefs about teacher's learning. Kath, a teacher of more than thirty years, was representative of the larger group of teachers who had observed many new policies affecting teachers' growth and development over their decades of teaching, and unlike the younger teachers, felt cynical about the policy guidelines. Kath asserted in her interviews that her cynicism was based on pedagogical complaints. She affirmed that '*some people resent it because it's almost questioning their professionalism.*' Kath described one of the experiences that fuelled her increasing cynicism:

*I turned up to one of the sessions over at Beach Point Centre across the road, and there must have been forty teachers there who were all freely admitting that their motivation for attending was because it was free and it was close by. The workshop was on 'stress and bullying'. None of us thought it was a real issue quite frankly, but it did give us all an extra hour towards the 37½. Do you think they were really interested in it? They probably dozed off. It's when it's itsy and bitsy like that, and there's no follow up, just like the session I described, you keep it all on a piece of paper and you say to the Department – 'There you are. Are you happy, because now I've got my week off!*

Kath was also concerned about the decrease in yearly teaching time and admitted that she didn't want a week off. Many of the eighty five teachers, over a wide range of years in teaching expressed a similar view declaring that they did not want the wider community thinking that teachers were looking for an easier load. A further concern for many teachers with families involved the section of the policy guidelines which prevented a teacher from undertaking any activities from the end of one school year until the beginning of the next. This group of teachers argued that this period of time was the one time in the year when they were relaxed and had time to think about their teaching and their development.

### **Post-welfarist abrogation of responsibility**

Throughout the year-long fieldwork, one of the most influential mechanisms at work affecting teachers' attitudes towards the new policy was the growing and cynical belief that no matter what

you talked about, and what you came up with, nothing really changed in the classrooms or even in the wider organisation of the school.

The longer serving teachers suggested that even if a teacher was more of a *'thinker'* (their interpretation of the opposite of someone who does what they are told) what help would that be in dealing with a difficult class of unmotivated Year 10 students in a 105-minute Maths lesson? From the participants' viewpoints, the cumulative impact of years of seemingly wasted teacher development time, whether in the form of professional development in a staff meeting, or a student free day, had been a loss of faith in the possibility for positive change. In addition to a general sense of mistrust by those in leadership who had been considered the wasters of their time, there had been an increasing sense of abandonment by an educational bureaucracy that was increasingly distancing itself from the realities within school sites. Kath expressed her disappointment:

*I just think the Department has abrogated their responsibility for teacher professional development by using all these individual groups who are outsourced to deliver services to us.*

As the year progressed, increasing numbers of teachers were close to completing their required hours. Their selections reflected an eclectic assortment of conferences, one-day sessions on specific topics, as well as limited professional reading. On the sheets there was no acknowledgment of the interactions with other teachers in their workplace and no resistance to its exclusion from the required hours' summary sheets. However, teachers did express daily conflicts with their beliefs, values and pedagogical praxis when presented with an assorted bag of theories and ideologies about teaching and learning from the selected teacher development activities.

Without a recognised forum to sort through the conflicts, individual teachers were forced to sort and re-sort throughout their daily teaching experiences on their own. Teachers were surrounded by strong encouragement to enthusiastically embrace quick fix, one size suits all propaganda in the form of brochures, enticing posters and emails, and it was easy to see why the insistence on the notion of teacher as a thinker and teacher as a transformative individual, was becoming devalued in the day to day business of getting things done in order to meet prescribed deadlines.

The preservation of '*the regularities of schooling*', as Elmore (1992, p.45) describes them, became paramount in ensuring that teachers went about their business with minimal opportunity to disrupt or challenge. Emerging from a wide cross section of the teachers regardless of career service, was the assertion that they were capable of finding their own solutions for better teaching and learning, but they needed to feel motivated and trusted to seek out new challenges and new ways of thinking within school time and as part of their daily job. There was an insistence that this was best achieved in the company of other colleagues both in formal and informal situations, and importantly on an ongoing basis.

If the investment in the professional development service providers beyond school and professional development policy that supported the individual pursuit away from job and schooling sites continued, then teachers believed that they were prevented from becoming active participants in their learning processes because this kind of partnership or community was not officially valued through the required '*rituals of verification*' (Power, 1997). The emphasis on the more quantitative methods of checking and verification increasingly placed doubt in teachers' minds about their own methods of verifying the value of an activity, an experience or an interaction.

### **The teacher learner community continues despite official recognition**

According to Grossman, Wineburg et al (2001), a '*teacher community*' involved two essential elements which are interwoven within the interactions that take place. Firstly, there is an '*essential tension*' within the community of people and secondly there is '*continuing intellectual development*' related to the work responsibilities of the group. Teachers who shared the same work space believed that these elements were often separated in the structure of professional development programs because the first element focused teachers' attention on the improvement of student learning while the second element focused on the teacher as a student of subject matter (Grossman, Wineburg et al., 2001, p.952). In a '*teacher community*' the two elements must fuse together and like a chemical reaction create a '*dynamic process subject to change at a moment's notice*' (Grossman, Wineburg et al., 2001, p.952). Of course, such communities can be extremely fragile because any change to the composition of the community can affect a teacher's decision and capacity to continue membership, however, the basic premise which connects teacher community to teacher learning is that the former can provide a meaningful venue to achieve the latter (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Darling-Hammond and Sykes, 1999; Lieberman and Grolnick, 1996; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001; Nelson and Hammerman, 1996).

Within such a community, teachers offer help to each other, and they learn from what others say and do, as well as recycle and reform within the membership of the community. It can be a possible source of valuable, meaningful and enduring personal and professional development. From my observations and discussions, cultivating a '*teacher community*' was in essence a process

of giving and taking towards the improvement of each person as a teacher of students and a learner of their subjects. Teachers talked about special groups of which they belonged – faculty groups linked by subjects; special interest groups linked by a strong commitment to social justice; informal groups such as the school staff band made up of people who loved music. The *taking* aspect changes as experience accumulates and then the more experienced teacher then gives his/her resources to the newest of teachers. Teachers talked about fairness and a cyclical aspect to this cultivation of '*teacher community*', and one that seemed to be working for many of the teachers including the group who shared their working space and who specialised in Mathematics and Science teaching. It was the informality and unpredictability of the community that was probably most effective according to the teachers involved. It had the kind of '*essential tension*' that Grossman, Weinberg et al (2001, p.951) discovered.

The leader of this group, Kath, despite being able to list many mildly successful to completely failed reform initiatives regarding teacher development over her career of thirty years, directed from the school leadership and the state bureaucracy, her strong belief was that the precious and limited time that teachers had away from their classrooms was sadly but predominantly spent on what she called '*bandaging*'. It incorporated activities that schools participated in that convinced:

*...the education powers that be...that you're doing the right thing...that you are making steps towards implementing their new philosophy or idea, but a lot of time is wasted – it's wasted because what we are doing is too superficial. You don't have enough time to do anything else.*

Indeed Kath believed that her job as a curriculum leader was directly centred on people and not on curriculum. She thought that the Principal would describe her job differently, but as far as she was

concerned her job was about people. Kath saw her shared workplace on the second floor as a working and successful teacher community:

*...a real hive of frustration with papers flitting backwards and forwards...discovering what's on your desk and there's a lot of talk going on in that room, and even though on the one hand people have said to me, 'this is a disaster. It is an occupational health and safety issue, and why are you all working in here? Why aren't the shelves fixed? Why is there stuff all over the floor?' ...but in amongst that chaos, there's a fair bit of really good exchange happening...really good exchange about why stuff happens and what doesn't happen. And sometimes, we're just too busy and some of the teachers say, 'I haven't got time for that and I haven't got my folder. What have you got?' A lot of that happens. Sometimes it starts off being based on tiredness, I guess, but it actually turns into something positive and productive because you look at it [someone else's folder] and you wouldn't have put it that way...you wouldn't have even worded it that way. You realise that you really like the way he or she's worded that – it's much clearer.*

Kath was clear that there was a willingness on her part to listen to the directives from afar, but always they were digested within her personal culture of democracy, morality, ethics and social justice, and always focused on the students in her school and the teachers in her care. For this she was rewarded both in the conversations that I had with those whom she touched, and openly by the people themselves. Kath conducted her '*professional community*' (Little, 2003, p.913) in the same way that a musical conductor might conduct her orchestra, depending on each individual musician to contribute and interact in order to create new possibilities, in this context, for individual

development, changes in practice and a collective capacity to make significant improvements in classrooms (Little, 2003, p.914).

## **Conclusion**

At every level of the educational bureaucracy, there has been a compelling attraction to the rhetoric of '*self-management*'. Complexities, difficulties, contextual differences, and indeed the politics of education have increasingly disappeared from discussion with schools and their leaders, while the optimism about the changes that self-management would bring, thrived.

*'Partnerships 21'* provided a convincing solution to the increasing inability of government to adequately and continuously resource the aging and under-supported public school system. It was far more strategic (adopting a corporate metaphor) to suggest to school leaders that under the umbrella of '*Partnerships 21*', they would have increased control of their schools. There was little overt resistance to the evolving market-oriented school and to the growing hegemony evident in the ways in which teachers responded to the specific professional development framework espoused in 1999, providing teachers with an additional week's leave, on completion of a set number of hours of training and professional development carried out in their own time.

Teachers, despite recounting their activities through the quantitative means of attendance certificates, covertly relied on their teacher learner communities in their work spaces as a significant means of extending their professional skills, knowledge and understanding. Individual teachers valued and even prioritised connections with leaders, who displayed effort in nurturing

and shaping each member, both individually and collectively. There was significant evidence of changes in practice, individual development and an enhanced collective capacity that seemed to be able to face, digest and re-form the onslaught of disjointed and multi-theorised educational strategies and policies that emanated from outside the school setting via the private providers of teacher development programs.

The '*required hours*' policy's success depended on teachers willingly accepting their new obligations, and becoming more concerned with the payoff at the end of the year than with the ethical issues related to whether the activities genuinely assisted them in their teaching. Sadly, teachers involved in this study reluctantly acknowledged that the proponents of the policy guidelines never had their professional development needs foremost in their minds, but instead perceived the new policy as a way of legitimising funding cuts for teacher professional development. It was so easy for teachers to be totally consumed with tabulating and seeking verification for their hours. While teachers were signing sheets of paper verifying thirty seven and a half hours of professional development undertaken outside of school hours, with attendance certificates and other quantitative documentation, the real verification tools which were the stories about students and teaching, never found their way onto the sheets, and even discussion about students and the experiences that occurred in workspaces, were rarely if ever communicated in any official capacity.

The reality for the teachers in this study was that they often worked with their daily classroom experiences and their collegial partnerships as the only source of knowledge and debate that served to shape their subjectivities and their practices. With the focus on the time off during the final week

of school, it was clear to the majority of teachers in this study that this policy's intent energetically dissuaded teachers from critiquing its structure, making it difficult to imagine and create alternate possibilities for their growth and development as teachers. The management of the implementation of the guidelines was peripheral to the Education Department's concerns, and so any emerging disagreements and frustrations such as what defined a normal activity were pushed out into the school sites. In keeping with the '*self-managing*' ideology, the implementation issues were directly in the school's court. The only issue the departmental bureaucracy had on their mind was whether there were savings in the state education budget.

The '*required hours*' professional development policy had not changed what teachers regarded as essential for their learning, however it did change their willingness to declare their beliefs. Professional reading and professional conversations were ongoing and essential components of many participants' learning lives. On the '*required hours*' proformas, however, it was generally missing. The quantitative emphasis was already affecting their ability to openly declare what they thought were genuine growth activities and what were not. There was a definite awareness that there was a game to be played, and why fight it when the better plan was to just learn the rules and move along.

The new paradigm set in motion an increasing confusion for teachers between learning that was verified by an attendance certificate, and the kind of learning that happened in other, less formal ways but lacked the necessary evidence, and hence was increasingly considered invalid. The new definition of teacher learning necessitated measurability in time, and significantly and increasingly

swayed teachers to unquestionably adopt techniques of verification, disqualifying other valuable experiences as inappropriate because of a lack of measurability.

Teachers in this study found themselves in daily conflicts with the beliefs, values and pedagogical praxis that presented them with an assorted bag of theories and ideologies about teaching and learning, which they were forced to sort and re-sort throughout their daily teaching experiences. Teachers were pressured to embrace the quick fix, one size suits all design and presentation of the more skills and training oriented teacher development, and as the year progressed the notion of teacher as a thinker and teacher as a transformative individual, was increasingly devalued by the teachers as they carried out the daily business of getting things done in order to meet the '*required hours*'.

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